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THROUGH
OLD-RESE
GLASSES



MARY·TRACY·EARLE

Best love and
Merry Christmas to
and the
Merry

Dec 25th
1902

For
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THROUGH OLD
ROSE GLASSES
❧ ❧ AND OTHER
STORIES ❧ ❧ ❧
BY MARY TRACY EARLE

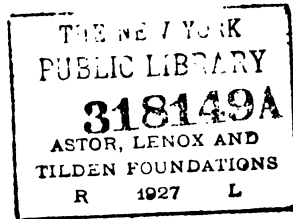


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M. F.



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JOY VAN
JULIA
VANSEL

TO
MY TEACHER AND STEADFAST FRIEND
JOSEPH C. PICKARD
THESE STORIES ARE GRATEFULLY DEDICATED
IN MEMORY OF MUCH HELP
AND OF MY FIRST STORY
WHICH HE SO KINDLY READ AND SENT
OUT INTO THE WORLD



TRANSFER FROM C. O. JUN - 1827

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THROUGH OLD-ROSE GLASSES

GABRIELLE felt the cool, earth-scented dawn against her face. The wondering starlight, the ghostly sand road leading off among the pines, the shadowy closed station, all bewildered her.

At dusk the evening before, she had left the crowded, lighted city, had gone to sleep and dreamed. Still in the dusk, she had been called up and left on the lonely station platform where she stood.

"Your trunk is already in the carriage," said the general, picking up her valise. "This way. Miss Cameron came, Peter."

A white-haired negro driver bowed and replied, "We suhtainly is glad to see you, miss," while the general helped her into the carriage.

Gabrielle did not know who the general was or why he was meeting her, until he said, "I am an old friend of your mother's, dear Miss Gabrielle. She was greatly admired in Virginia, and I one of her warmest admirers. Miss Sarah sent me to bring you safely to Sweet Hall. I am General Brandon."

"Tell me about Miss Sarah," Gabrielle

begged. "You know I have never met her. This is my first visit in Virginia."

The general glanced up at the paling stars, and Gabrielle caught the outlines of his face for the first time. It was thin and hard and bony, evidently worn by years, and perhaps by other things. "Miss Sarah is an angel," he answered concisely. "A beautiful woman, a patient friend, a lady of the old school, gentle, refined, pure — an angel."

Gabrielle smiled. There was an impulse of retort in her which even the starlight could not quite subdue. "But I never knew an angel," she said. "Tell me what she is like."

"I can't!" he exclaimed harshly. "You have to know her a lifetime to know what she is like, and then you can't tell, more than you can tell of one of those stars. It's a point of light infinitely above you — that's all."

The girl looked up where he pointed, wondering that he should permit himself so bitter a tone. The dusk had a faint pallor, as if the silver lining were showing itself through the night clouds. The stars themselves were silvery and faint, and they twinkled down at the moving blot of the carriage on the white road and at the even lances of the pines in rest on either side, as if they were signaling farewell. Slowly and gently one of them left its place and slipped across the sky. It would not have seemed strange if the others had followed it, leaving empty space for the day.

"That means that some one has died," Gabrielle murmured, — "when a star falls."

"I'm glad it's not I," the general answered. "I'm afraid of dying."

"Are you?" Gabrielle asked helplessly. This old man seemed rather an eerie companion with whom to be watching the mysterious death of night.

"Yes," he declared, "I'm afraid. Most bad men are afraid to die."

There was no comment possible on such a remark at such short acquaintance. It would have been idle for Gabrielle to assure him that he was not bad, when she did not know. Old Peter chirruped to the horse in a way that was almost a chuckle. The breeze stirred through the pines, and the horse's hoofs padded softly in and out of the sand.

"I suppose you wonder at my admitting myself to be bad," the general went on, "but this is a world in which evil succeeds. It makes its mark in more ways than one, though, and our faces show it in the end. A man might as well have it written across his forehead, — afraid to die."

"Perhaps you read more in faces than most people can," Gabrielle suggested.

"Perhaps," he admitted tersely. "A lawyer should, and I'm a lawyer. I'm a religious man, too," he went on presently; "that is, I'm a religious man just this far: I believe in

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a hell where the people who miss their punishment here will get it hereafter. That's why I am afraid of dying."

Gabrielle glanced sidewise at him to see if there was any suggestion of insanity in his face. She thought that either he or Miss Sarah, or perhaps both of them, must be insane, or a man who was capable of beginning an acquaintance in this way would never have been sent in the gray dawn to meet her at the station. The general did not look insane. An impartial light had stolen swiftly into the whole sky, putting out the stars, and it showed a man with a haggard face in which all the lines suggested wickedness, but it had intellectual strength which saved it from entire repulsiveness. Apparently he was talking for the relief of expressing himself frankly, as people are tempted to speak to strangers; but he must have forgotten that she was not to be a stranger long. When they reached Sweet Hall and Miss Sarah, he might remember and be sorry. A moment of silence had fallen between them, and she broke it in the thoughtful, gently combative voice of abstract discussion.

"Don't you think that most people are punished in this life?" she asked.

He laughed with a clatter of ridicule, but no mirth, and for the first time since they had left the station he looked at her. A glint of approbation shone out through the contemp-

tuous expression on his face, and died away. "I am a lawyer," he repeated, "a successful lawyer, and I know whether people are punished as they deserve or not." His voice fell so that Peter could not hear. "If I were punished as I deserve, I should be hung myself—hung for murder. Every one knows it, but I am the only one who dares say so. I have sent more than one innocent man to the gallows to clear a guilty client. Nobody in the State can arrange evidence or plead against me, and whenever I see a chance of winning my services are to be had. I have held high offices, and defied the laws which I made other people obey. I have been above the law, a law unto myself, but I'm getting old, and I'm afraid to die. I have triumphed in this life, but there is a hell for such as me."

Gabrielle had withdrawn her glance from his face, and was watching the little flurries of white sand scatter to left and right as the horse trotted; but she could feel him watching her narrowly, and it occurred to her that he was deliberately studying the effect of his words. With the reassurance of daylight he seemed less uncanny and more to be disliked. She turned to him again with a smile.

"Let us think of the past instead of the future, General Brandon," she said. "Tell me of the old times, when my mother was a girl."

He acquiesced with a bow. "I was one of

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your mother's warmest admirers," he declared ; "and now that the light is fuller, the years seem to glide away. You are your mother's image, dear Miss Gabrielle."

"That is what people always say to daughters who go back," the girl said, parrying his gallant tone.

"You will find that Miss Sarah will say so," he answered simply, "and Miss Sarah's statements are above and beyond all doubt."

Gabrielle wondered at the conviction of his tone. He might be old and wicked and afraid to die, but he had a child's faith in Miss Sarah. She tried to picture her mother's friend out of the reminiscences with which he passed the remainder of the six miles to Sweet Hall ; but the image was elusive, for his praise was so absolute that it was colorless. Miss Sarah was an angel, that was all, and the girl's mind grew alert with curiosity about her.

To an angel, six o'clock of a spring morning was evidently too early an hour for revelations. Peter opened the great hall door, and the girl passed into the loneliness of an unawakened house. An old negro woman came forward with a hushed manner, and, after greeting her, led the way upstairs. Gabrielle bade the general good-morning, and followed her. From the upper hall a soft voice spoke, flattening and twisting its vowels in a way which takes the place of a written lineage.

"Did Miss Gabrielle arrive, Lucy?"

"Yes, Miss Sarah."

"Come here, child."

The upper hall was dusky, its windows curtained. Gabrielle went toward the voice, and found herself at a door held slightly open by the white intimation of a hand.

"Has the general gone home?" questioned the voice behind the door.

"Yes, Miss Sarah."

The door opened farther, and a white frill with the voice inside peeped out. A slender hand clasped the girl's warmly. "Dear Gabrielle," the voice said, "it was mighty sweet of you to come so far to visit me, and I certainly do appreciate it. Go right to your room, child, and go to sleep. We will breakfast late, for you must be tired."

The white frill brushed the girl's face, and she was kissed and sent away. She had not seen well enough to return the kiss very accurately, but she had an impression of soft cheeks, delicately curved but thin, an oval face, and a kindly manner exquisitely finished with a reserve like the mist of cold dew on a rose. Miss Sarah's door closed, and opened again.

"We shall breakfast at ten, my dear, so you will have time for a refreshing sleep."

Daylight was prying round the curtains in Gabrielle's room. The long drive, the excitement of arriving at a strange place at a strange

hour, her interest in Miss Sarah, her unpleasant impressions of the general, all combined to make her wakeful past all possibility of sleep. It seemed to her that she could not bear the slow passage of the hours till ten o'clock. She was impatient to explore Sweet Hall, to know Miss Sarah, to meet Miss Sarah's neighbors, and to find out what their life was like.

Her mother had said to her : " You cannot understand it till you see it, Gabrielle. You cannot imagine such endless empty days, such thin husks of life, such narrow views. You would go crazy there. I was brought up in it, and I escaped ; now you want to marry Staige Gordon and go back into it without knowing what it is. I only ask you to visit Miss Sarah before you answer him." And Gabrielle had complied, without much fear, but with great curiosity. Her mother had told her so little of Virginia that she had never come into her birthright of interest in the old State until she met Staige Gordon. He was different from any other man she knew, — more vitally alive, more earnest. He was a minister ; she had never cared much for ministers out of the pulpit, but Staige was different, — so young, so free from set phrase or any badge except his manliness to mark him as a special servant of the Lord. He had made the life she lived seem empty and purposeless, and she had only smiled to herself when her mother had said

the same things of his life ; and yet, for her mother's sake, she was willing to make this visit before she promised him. Her meeting with the general had dismayed her a little, giving her a sense of having entered an atmosphere more foreign than she could apprehend ; but she laughed at the thought of letting the strange conversation of one bad old man oppress her like an omen of unhappiness for herself and Staige.

More and more brightness came through the window, until, in spite of the curtain, the room was white with day. It was strangely bare, and affected the wide-eyed girl like a cell, a big graceless cell, from which she would not be freed till ten o'clock. She turned restlessly in her bed, and thought over the things which she had thought before. She felt her mother's good-by kiss, and heard the whispered last words, "Think every day what it would be if it went on for years."

There was not a book in the room. She turned again, and discovered herself to be frantically hungry ; if that went on for years, she should grow very thin. It was as if she had been sent to bed supperless for punishment, and while the hours dragged along she wondered if hunger was an affliction unknown to angels, and ladies of the old school. At last Lucy came to the door to call her, and her heart began beating tumultuously with the

thought that the first day of her odd investigation had begun.

At breakfast her question about Miss Sarah's appetite was answered; notwithstanding the late hour, Miss Sarah did little more than say grace over her plate. She recommended Gabrielle to help herself, again and again, to batter bread, beaten biscuit, and waffles; and when Gabrielle continually accepted, she looked pleased, but surprised.

"Traveling always makes me hungry," Gabrielle explained; "in fact, I'm usually hungry."

"A good appetite is a great blessing, my dear," Miss Sarah assured her. "Did you enjoy your journey down?"

"I slept," Gabrielle answered. "I always sleep well on the cars."

Miss Sarah's delicate face grew sympathetic. "Are you troubled with wakefulness at home?" she asked.

"No," said Gabrielle.

A smile which had once owned dimples in Miss Sarah's cheeks gave a hasty glance across her face to see if they were still there. "It is fortunate that you sleep well," she said. "To sleep well and to have a good appetite assure good health. Did you find the drive tiresome from the station?"

"Oh, not at all," the girl answered. "It was just dawn, you know, and one meteor fell

when the stars were so faint we could scarcely see it."

"And the general was entertaining? He insisted upon meeting you, though I feared it might embarrass you to be met by a stranger."

Gabrielle was aware that all her answers were the answers of a child, but she could find no other way to speak. It seemed appropriate, too, for the four walls of the room stared at her with grim prudery out of the eyes of yellowed engravings, giving her a persistent consciousness of youth. "I was n't embarrassed," she said half shyly, thinking of the queer statements of the general. "I found him interesting."

"The general is always interesting," Miss Sarah declared. "He is a very prominent man in Virginia. He is considered very fascinating."

Gabrielle marveled, but dared not show it. "I think it was kind of him to meet me," she said. "No, I really could n't take another waffle, thank you."

Miss Sarah dismissed Lucy and the waffles. "I suppose your mother has told you a great deal about General Brandon, my dear?" she suggested, folding her napkin with exactitude.

"No," Gabrielle acknowledged; "or at least I don't remember, if she has. Mamma is seldom reminiscent."

A thin flush spread over Miss Sarah's del-

icately chiseled face. "My dear," she said, with an unexpected quality of tone, which showed that, with all her sedateness, she was speaking from impulse and right out of her heart, — "my dear, it is a great gratification to me that your mother should have sent you to me. I have always half feared that she did not quite forgive me for something that happened in the past. But her letter showed all the old friendship. We had never quarreled, you know; and although she is somewhat younger than I, we were always the most intimate of friends, yet I feared that in the depths of her heart there might be some feeling of injury or regret. But when her letter came, saying that she could not bear to have your girlhood all pass in ignorance of the old places and the life we lived, I knew that she had forgiven me. I think she must be very happy, or she could not have written so. She *is* very happy, is she not, Gabrielle?"

"Yes," the girl answered, with an odd little pain at thought of the double meaning of her mother's words. "I think, as the world goes, that mamma is very happy. I know few people as interested in their lives as she is in hers. She is sure that everything is worth while, — that is, in New York. I don't think she has any regrets, and I don't believe you ever injured any one, Miss Sarah."

Miss Sarah glanced down at one of her fra-

gile hands, which rested, trembling slightly, on the table. The fine blue veins and the slender tendons showed in it, and an old-fashioned ring hung loosely on the third finger. "You would scarcely believe it from seeing me now," she began hurriedly, "but except for me, my dear, the general and your mother might have married. You might have been General Brandon's daughter."

"Oh, no!" cried Gabrielle.

Miss Sarah misunderstood her little gasp of surprise and revulsion. "Indeed, my dear, his manner makes him seem young, but he is more than old enough to be your father," she declared. "He is always attentive to young ladies. Did he tell you that he was coming over to take you driving this morning?"

"No, he didn't mention it," said Gabrielle. She wondered if it was a necessary part of old-fashioned etiquette that she should have no voice in the matter.

Miss Sarah looked rather pleased at his omission, although she had evidently been pleased at his planning to be attentive to her guest. "I presume he thought that, on such short acquaintance, it would be more appropriate for me to speak of it," she explained. "The general is very thoughtful, my dear, and he will not forget his appointment. He never forgets — in fact, I think he is coming now."

She rose and went to the window. Gabrielle

followed, and saw the general in a single-seated phaeton, driving a lively span of horses toward the door. Miss Sarah clasped the girl's arm. The color came up into her cheeks and her eyes shone. "Gabrielle, dear, don't think me impertinent," she begged, "but I must take care of you in your mother's place. Perhaps she did not think to tell you that the general is very fascinating to young girls. It is because he is so attentive and chivalrous, but — but if he says anything to you while you are out driving, you must not take him too seriously."

Gabrielle felt a shudder of alarm. It had been bad enough to drive with him when he talked of dying; his love-making would be more than she could bear. "Do I *have* to go with him, Miss Sarah?" she asked anxiously.

"Indeed, I don't mean to keep you from having a good time," Miss Sarah answered. "I hope you'll see a great deal of the general while you are here. Of course you'll go with him."

The general had little to say in the beginning of the drive, and his hard old countenance seemed more evil at midday than at dawn. Lines of suffering in it, which would have gained Gabrielle's sympathy at once if they had been in the face of a good man, only added to her sense of revulsion from him. Under his eyes there were swollen areas of purple outlined by deep black marks, and

heavy downward creases debarred the narrow fold of his cheek on each side from his mouth. If his eyes had been more prominent, they would have added the last touch of repugnance to his features ; but they were deep-set, and might have suggested a soul, if they had not been too dull to express anything but illness and pain.

Gabrielle made the few remarks which seemed necessary, and then sat in silence, giving more thought to the man beside her and the woman she had left than to the lonely old homesteads which the general pointed out with brief mention as they passed. Her heart sank with a desolation which she did not understand, and she shivered and drew a little farther toward her side of the seat, remembering Miss Sarah's almost proud assurance, "You might have been General Brandon's daughter."

"Do you drive?" the general asked suddenly.

"Yes," Gabrielle answered. "I like to."

"Good," he said, and held the reins across to her. "There is more pleasure in driving. Take them."

His hand was shaking, and a glance at his face showed all the signs of physical illness which she had ignored in it before. The veins on his forehead were swollen, and his color was congested and dark, as if he were on the point of some violent seizure.

"Thank you," she said, taking the reins. Her own hands were trembling, and at first she could not confront the situation. The road stretched down a long wild hillside, with no houses in sight. Behind was an empty bit of forest. The general leaned back with his eyes closed, and groaned. She bent toward him.

"You are suffering. What can I do for you?" she asked.

"At the bottom of the hill — a spring," he said. "Drive fast."

She nodded and spoke to the horses. They were ready for speed, but tender-mouthed, and there was exhilaration in guiding them down the rough road, with constant swervings to avoid rocks and ruts. At the bottom of the road a strip of dark mud across the track marked the overflow of the spring. The spring itself was half hidden by the rich growth which it watered. Gabrielle sprang out, hurried to the clump of green, and parted the leaves. Her own excited face looked up at her out of a shadowed handbreadth of water. An old brown gourd hung on a beheaded sapling at one side. She filled it, and turned to hurry back.

The general was hanging at the side of the carriage, one foot on the step, one hand grasping the dashboard, and the other clinging to the supports of the carriage cover. Before she could reach him or call out, he sank heavily to

the ground between the wheels. She dropped the gourd, and, running behind the phaeton, lifted the back of it round so that the wheels could turn without passing over him; then she led the horses away, and tied them.

The general followed her motions with his eyes, and when she filled the gourd again and came back to him, he was able to say, "Vertigo — my head."

She poured water over his forehead and hair, and, taking him by the shoulders, drew him on to the grass at the roadside. After that she saturated the linen lap-robe at the spring, and wrapped it round his head. His hands were cold. She chafed them, searched through the carriage, found a heavier lap-robe, and covered him with it. Then she stood and looked down at him.

As long as there was anything she could do, she had worked with little thought except to take as good care of him as she knew how. His slight weight had seemed easy to handle, and she had moved him with no consciousness of his personality, just as she had swung the carriage to one side without being aware of its weight. But now he and his illness became gruesome to her. The fear of death which he had confessed was in his eyes, and a horror of his darkened face and struggling respiration crept over her and surrounded her, as if she had suddenly begun to feel the pressure of the

atmosphere, from which there is no escape. The sensation got into her throat, so that she could scarcely find her voice, but, commanding it, she stooped and asked if she should go for help.

"No, it is passing," he said. "Stay."

His eyes implored her with the last word, so that she took his hands again and rubbed them; but the tenderness of the action did not change her sense of being held against her will. His illness seemed like part of the moral degradation which she felt about him. She believed that she should have felt it if he had not declared it to her himself, and she wondered if Miss Sarah, with her exquisite refinement, could be as ignorant of it as she appeared.

Not a wayfarer came in sight of them. The white clouds drifted silently above, and somewhere in the distance a mourning dove cooed, with insistent repetition of its hopelessness. The horses strained back and forth to the limit of their tether, cramping the phaeton until the wheels scraped against the guards, and kept looking inquiringly toward the general. Once one of them whinnied.

The general's hand closed sharply on Gabrielle's. "I shall die like this some day," he whispered. "I shall die and go to hell. Don't you see why I'm afraid?"

The girl's nerves recoiled; he was aware of it, and he pulled her hand closer to him, though

she had not tried to withdraw it. She had to lean a trifle nearer, while his eyes held hers by their revolting fear of being left alone. She could not speak to reassure him ; she would scarcely have spoken if she could. The moments passed in an intense abhorrence which turned her white and haggard. A vision of herself as another person came to her, and a shudder of pity crossed her face.

The general saw it, and his grasp relaxed a little, though he still detained her hand. "You are sorry for me," he said weakly, "sorry for a bad man fearing death. But I am much better now ; soon we can go on. You have been very good to me, and very brave. You are your mother's image, dear Miss Gabrielle. She feared nothing."

The girl followed an unexpected impulse in her answer. "Miss Sarah tells me you were very fond of my mother once," she told him.

The old man smiled. "Your mother was charming. I was one of her warmest admirers," he declared in the set phrase which was part of his code of compliment. "I have been fond of many women at many times, but only of one woman at all times, dear Miss Gabrielle."

"Miss Sarah ?" Gabrielle asked.

"She is an angel," the old man said softly, — "like a point of light infinitely above me, like a star" —

Gabrielle looked away. She had seen the


tears gathering in his eyes. He was silent a moment, and then his hand tightened again on hers. "You will not tell her," he pleaded. "This is nothing, only a passing vertigo, but it might alarm her, and she could scarcely pardon me for giving you such an unpleasant experience, — such an unsuitable experience for a young girl. She had intrusted you to me for entertainment. I felt ill, but I had no thought of anything like this."

Gabrielle could see his haggard soul in his eyes, and she felt sure that something deeper than his fear of Miss Sarah's displeasure at the turn her entertainment had taken was pleading for secrecy. "Of course I shall say nothing about this," she assured him, "but I think you ought to tell her you are feeling ill. She is such an old friend."

"No, no!" he answered sharply, pushing the wet cloth back from his forehead, and rising to his elbow. "I am Miss Sarah's suitor. It would be taking advantage of her sympathy." His arm shook as it supported him, but his face was determined. "We will drive on. I am well enough now," he said. "This will all pass. I have had a touch of it before, and I know. The air is what I need. We will take a long drive, and by dinner-time I shall be myself. You are not afraid to take a ten-mile circuit with me, round by Lochinvar, to save Miss Sarah from alarm?"

"For Miss Sarah's sake," Gabrielle answered, with a smile, thinking of Miss Sarah's warning. The general had evidently passed the time when he could be relied on to make love to all young girls, but it was terrible to think of driving with him ten miles farther. She helped him into the carriage, in spite of his protest that he should be helping her. The horses pawed eagerly as she untied them. The general leaned back against the cushions, weak and a trifle dizzy still, and did not talk. Gabrielle gave her attention to the horses, and tried to keep herself from consciously loathing him. She felt as if she had taken the skeleton out of somebody's closet, and were driving with it. And this was Miss Sarah's lover, and too chivalrous to tell her he was ill. She wondered upon what footing he and Miss Sarah stood.

Gradually her thought wandered from these strange old lovers to her own life, in which love wavered in the balance against the loneliness of which her mother had told her, and which she realized now as she rode beside the general through the silent country, meeting only negroes and curious-eyed, unkempt white people who could never be a part of her life. And yet it was unfair to judge of the queer old country without Staige. Staige, with his vitality and purpose, could bring any place to life, and the very loneliness which her reason counted against his cause had an opposite



effect upon her heart. Here of all places she felt that she needed him. Thinking of him seemed to protect her from the general's presence, and all the way round Lochinvar she played with the fancy that he was sitting between her and the old man with the ghastly face.

The days passed slowly at Sweet Hall. To Gabrielle their unbroken aimlessness was not plausible. They were all like dreams in which the dreamer is conscious of unreality, although the knowledge of the general's concealed illness hung above each hour like a threat. Time and again he quitted Sweet Hall abruptly, with such a look as had preceded his attack, and, until his next visit, Gabrielle watched every figure that approached along the road with a certainty that it was a messenger bringing bad news.

Miss Sarah, all in ignorance, talked of the general's odd fascinating ways, and exerted herself to provide other social life, in order, Gabrielle felt, that her young friend might not become too much attached to him. Two maiden ladies and a broken-down college student drove across from Lochinvar, and asked Gabrielle over some afternoon to play croquet. The clergyman from a cross-roads chapel called, and two girls, third cousins of Miss Sarah's, came from their homes, twenty miles distant, and stayed three days. There was a ball in Sweet Briar, the little railway town, and al-

though Gabrielle would not let the general and Miss Sarah take her, for fear it would tire them, the discussion of the question was an event in itself. Gabrielle wrote home about it. When excitements crowded very close in the daytime, the Sweet Hall ladies went early to bed; and when the general came in the evening, to play dummy whist, Miss Sarah and Gabrielle took a nap next day. Gabrielle was amazed at the facility with which she learned to take naps, when other entertainments failed. Something favorable to napping pervaded the air. The people she met all spoke of taking naps, and sometimes, when she looked out across the green, sun-warmed hills, she caught the whole landscape taking its beauty sleep under a half-visible spring haze.

One morning after Peter had been to Sweet Briar for the mail, Gabrielle came dancing into Miss Sarah's room with an open letter in her hand. She was blushing with pleasure, excitement, and a certain shyness, and she looked at Miss Sarah half appealingly.

Miss Sarah folded the sheets of the county paper she was reading. "You have news, my dear?" she asked. She often said that Gabrielle wrote and received more letters than any one else she ever saw, — "certainly more than any other young lady," she would correct herself, thinking of the probable magnitude of the general's correspondence.

Gabrielle was transformed to childishness by her news. She gave a joyful swoop, and kissed Miss Sarah on both cheeks. "Oh, I'm so happy — so happy!" she cried. "I have a letter from Staige Gordon, and he's coming. Only think of it, he'll be here this afternoon, and I suppose I ought to meet him at the train."

"Meet him at the train — Staige Gordon?" Miss Sarah gasped out of a sea of bewilderment. "Not Staige Gordon of Gordonsville?" She got her head out of one wave only to have another break above it.

"Yes, Staige Gordon of Gordonsville!" Gabrielle cried. "Do you know him? He's coming this afternoon, and do you think it would be wrong if I asked the general to lend me his horses to drive to Sweet Briar and meet the train? Peter has been once, you know, and Job must be tired. The general is sure to be over before time to start."

"Sit down, sit down, my dear." Miss Sarah was smoothing out her dress, as if to have it in more correct folds would soothe her mind. "You speak so rapidly that I don't quite understand. Is Staige Gordon an acquaintance of yours?"

"An acquaintance!" the girl echoed frankly. "Why, I'm jumping up and down and clapping my hands at the thought of seeing him. He's a very dear friend."

Miss Sarah gasped again. "My dear," she protested, "if people were to hear you speak so unguardedly, they might think—why, I don't know what they would think."

"I suppose they would think I am very fond of him," the girl said, "and I am."

"But, surely," Miss Sarah insisted, flushing a little, "you would not wish people to know—why, I reckon that even if I were engaged to a young man I should hesitate—I should fear people would consider me indiscreet or unmaidenly"—

Gabrielle saw the whole refined, reticent, repressed, insincere life of the old-fashioned maidenly maidens exemplified in Miss Sarah's shocked face. She had never realized before how far her own ideals varied from those of the women a generation older than she. It hurt her a little that she had shocked Miss Sarah, not so much because she disliked being misunderstood as because it was painful to Miss Sarah to misunderstand. Her manner lost the exuberance which the thought of Staige's coming into that lonely place had given her.

"Why, Miss Sarah," she said gently, "can it be unmaidenly to show that one likes a man who is worthy to be liked, particularly if he has sought one's friendship?"

"There are little ways of showing favor," Miss Sarah answered, "but to go about reveal-

ing one's liking openly is certainly indiscreet ; and — and do you not shrink from the idea of it, my dear ?”

“Not at all,” said Gabrielle. “Women and men are both human ; I don't see why a girl should shrink from liking a man unless there is something repulsive about him, — some coarseness or wickedness.”

Miss Sarah drew back perceptibly from the mere words. “Don't, my dear,” she protested. “A young girl like you knows nothing about the wickedness of the world. It is better for you not to think of it. As long as a girl keeps her maidenly reserve she will never admit a man to too great intimacy, and if his intentions are serious, her parents can inquire into his habits. And as for your meeting a young man at the train, I could never permit that, my dear.”

“But why not ?” asked Gabrielle. “I meet so many of them every summer, when we are in the country, you know.”

“And your mother permits it ?” Miss Sarah's face was troubled.

“Why, of course she does. Sometimes they are to be guests at the house, and I take them home” —

“Your mother must have changed very much,” Miss Sarah interrupted, “and perhaps in the North it is not misunderstood ; but Staige Gordon is a Virginian, and if you were

to meet him at the train he would consider it an unbecoming advance ; and so, even if your mother permits it at home, I cannot permit it here."

"But, Miss Sarah" — Gabrielle wanted of all things to see Staige alone, and she felt as if she could not wait for the slow formalities. She dropped on one knee beside her friend, and looked up, half laughing, half pleading, into the frail old face which made her think of one of those exquisite miniatures in which all the lines glide imperceptibly beyond beauty into attenuated grace. "Staige will not misunderstand," she declared. "He knows our ways, and perhaps you will think differently when I tell you that he wants me to marry him."

"You are engaged?" Miss Sarah asked.

"No-o," said Gabrielle. "I'm thinking about it. I feel now as if he could help me think."

Miss Sarah smiled, and the smile turned wistful as she looked into the girl's face, seeing a little beyond its frankness into a sweet reserve just changing into confidence. "It is strange," she said, more sadly than she knew, "it seems natural for most women to look forward to marriage, but I could never bring myself to consider it."

Gabrielle understood, but she could not reach out impulsively, as she would if Miss Sarah had been less timid. They were silent a moment,

the shy, repressed older woman unconsciously envying the girl who dared to take her womanhood in full, and yet was broadly human quite as much as womanly. Gabrielle was first to speak :—

“It’s all right, then, for me to meet him, is n’t it?”

Miss Sarah came out of her musing. “Why, my dear,” she said in agitation,— “why, my dear, if he is your suitor and you have not accepted him, you certainly must not meet him at the train. It pains me to refuse you anything, but I should feel very remiss if I let you go. Peter can go again, or perhaps the general will go himself. Neither the general nor I have seen Staige since he was a little boy, but we shall both be pleased to meet him again. The Gordons are related to the Brandons, and of course the general will ask Staige to stop with him. It will be much pleasanter than at the hotel in Sweet Briar.”

“And much closer, too,” said Gabrielle. “I’m glad of that.”

“My dear!” expostulated Miss Sarah.

The girl laughed. She could not be repressed when Staige was coming. Staige would make her sure again that life is for the living in all places. It had scarcely been fair of her mother to send her down to judge of modern conditions in a spot which chance had made the loneliest in the State, robbing it of

its young people, and preserving it from contact with the world until all its old maids and bachelors and widows had fallen asleep.

The general had not fallen asleep, to be sure, but he was likely to at any time, and for long. He was looking very ill, yet he entered at once into the project of meeting and entertaining Staige, when Miss Sarah decorously intimated it to him, and he showed an old man's alertness in regard to love affairs, with an old beau's affectation of jealousy. It was hard to convince him that Staige was more than nineteen; yet when he expressed a mournful resignation at the prospect of sharing the ladies of Sweet Hall with a younger rival, it was evident that the difference in their ages did not strike him as very great. He begged Miss Sarah and Gabrielle to save him one or two smiles a day, and when he set out for Sweet Briar he kissed their hands. Gabrielle had never seen him so gay, and she and Miss Sarah had never been so full of repartee. She wanted to cry and laugh at the same time. The observer in her saw it all as such a pathetic spectacle, and the starved youth in her was so happy.

The carriage returned at last, but Gabrielle found that even happiness could not quite overcome the embarrassment which she felt at meeting Staige, with Miss Sarah looking on, ready to be horrified at too much cordiality, and the general watching like a hawk for some-

thing to joke about. Miss Sarah was painstakingly careful to say nothing which would mark Staige as a lover, but the general was anxious that he should be branded past mistake. Gabrielle had never heard jests so alarmingly personal, so evidently intended to make self-conscious sweethearts blush and writhe.

Staige did not seem disconcerted, and once his eyes sought hers, full of laughter, and she realized that he understood the general's lightness better, and was more prepared for it, than she. He had probably been teased in this way about every girl in his congregation, and was used to it. The thought pained her. It took from his dignity.

When the mid-afternoon dinner was over, relief finally came in the form of a discussion between the general and Miss Sarah in regard to a date which was quite out of Gabrielle's and Staige's memory; the sun, too, went down just then in a cloud of glory which required witnesses, and Miss Sarah thought there was excuse enough for sending the young people out into the garden, where they could talk alone.

"You will find it like the garden of Eden," the general said as they started out. "One thing grows there which you must not bring back to the house."

"What is that?" Staige asked. "What are we forbidden?"

The general laughed, but there was a curious undertone in his voice. "Bleeding hearts grow out there," he explained. "Don't bring them back."

Miss Sarah blushed faintly, though only Gabrielle was looking at her. "The dicentra is a flower that is very much admired," she said.

The general turned and lifted her hand to his lips. "It is so much admired that we pick it whether we would or no," he answered.

A silence which had loitered all through the brilliant sunlit day, waiting patiently for twilight in Miss Sarah's garden, came forward to meet the two young people as they went outdoors. They walked down a box-bordered path, and between blossoming lilacs, syringas, and calycanthus, standing in crowded groups, with their perfume around them like a special atmosphere; and, as they walked, they wondered what would be the first word they should say. Then they came to beds of lower-growing flowers, and in one of them was a great clump of bleeding hearts.

Gabrielle stooped and lifted a long stem which had curved over until the bright unbroken flowers at the tip were almost on the ground. Her own heart was torn by many thoughts. Doubts which she had believed Staige's coming would silence rose in her, unanswered. Even the sweetness of the garden would be hard to breathe, if it were to last for

years. Staige bent toward her, but she must not let him speak.

"Tell me," she said, — "everybody here knows everybody else, — tell me about the general and Miss Sarah."

Staige straightened himself, feeling as if he had let a moment which he needed slip out of his hands. "All Virginia knows their story," he answered. "The general has been courting Miss Sarah for thirty-five years. They say he proposes to her once a month, and she would miss it sadly if he stopped. There was a time when he held the love of half the girls in the State in his hands, and he threw it all away to reach for Miss Sarah's. He has never tired of reaching for it, because it is never within reach — that's all."

"And yet she loves him," Gabrielle said, — "I know she loves him. But how can she — how could all of them — when he seems so horribly evil?"

She spoke with an earnestness which made Staige feel as if the question of the general and Miss Sarah had some bearing upon his own life. "You must remember," he said almost sadly, "things were very different in those days. They are very different down here still. You can scarcely understand. The old-fashioned idea was to bring girls up in a sort of shy ignorance. They did not know that wickedness meant cruelty and unclean-

ness and selfishness. If they heard that a man was bad, they were not repelled from him, because they did not know what badness really means in any form. It was all a mystery, and so it fascinated them."

"Yes," the girl interrupted, "that is Miss Sarah's expression. She says the general is 'considered very fascinating.' It has seemed to me the strangest word for him; and sometimes, when I see her eyes resting on him in such a shy, pathetic way, I feel like crying. It's so pitiful that any good woman should not know some better fascination than that. And yet, when she can look at him so, why does n't she marry him?"

Staige shook his head. "I don't know, but perhaps it is like this," he suggested. "She may have an instinct which takes the place of knowledge, and keeps her above her own ideals. She is flattered by his devotion, and she loves him, and yet the pure soul in her unconsciously holds aloof; she thinks it is just 'maidenliness,' but perhaps she would never have felt so if the general had been a different man."

"But all those other girls," Gabrielle urged. "They were ready to marry him. Is it true that my mother was one of them?"

"Report says so," he told her. "It scarcely seems possible when one thinks of your father; but perhaps her memory of Virginia would be pleasanter except for that."

Gabrielle lifted a quivering face. "Perhaps so," she said; "but even without that, life would still be the same. People would still think that sleep was activity; ignorance, virtue; and insincerity, reserve. Miss Sarah is sure that a hundred things which make up my daily life are wicked, and yet she shuts her ears to all the wickedness the general boasts of, and her eyes to all that his face tells. I begin to understand why my mother said 'escaped.'"

He looked at her as she stood tremulous among the flowers, and the fear of what her words might be foretelling to him rose choking in his throat. He was too unprepared to plead with her, or to tell her what his life was as he saw it; he had told her long ago, and he had thought she understood, — that this trial was a mere form. He stepped closer; but when she saw his face the tears came up in her eyes, and she stooped again, groping for the bleeding hearts.

He caught at her arm. "Don't pick them," he begged hoarsely.

"Would n't it be better to pick them now than afterward?" she whispered. "I—I don't think I can face it, Staige. I believed I could when I came, I believed it this morning when I heard from you; but now, somehow, the thought of the long, repressed years—you are so much better than I—you can

do it for your work, for the hope of helping people, but I—I am afraid of all the people telling stories of the past. And to think it would n't be for a little while, but for all our lives; that is the awful part,—for all our lives."

He took his hand from her arm and stood silent, his pride pierced to the quick by realizing how much he had asked. She still searched blindly among the flowers, her breast rising and falling with quick, noiseless sobs, and he could not take her in his arms and comfort her, because she dared not face his life. The insistent sweetness of the garden swayed around them, and the sunlight left the tips of the tall pine-trees behind the house. It was one of those torturing pauses which are too sad to put an end to, because after them follows the full, unending sadness of the years.

After a long time she faced him once more. She had expected that he would speak. "Can you forgive me?" she asked.

"I wanted you to sacrifice too much," he said. "I did not know. You must forgive me."

"Don't," she begged sharply. He seemed to have gone farther from her than she thought he could with so few words, and she saw that he would not be like the general. He would never ask again.

He glanced toward the house. "Shall we

go in so soon, or walk a little farther?" he questioned.

"I can't go in yet," she said, and so they walked on through the importuning of the twilight; the dew distilled around them, and out of the slowly fading glow in the west the evening star began to shine. At the foot of the garden they turned to retrace their steps. It was startling to see how near they still were to the house, — they had gone so far.

"There is another thing," she said, wavering. "I—I can't go back to where I was before."

"Gabrielle?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know yet!" she cried. "I must take more time."

The house door was flung open, and Miss Sarah called in a voice as sharp and terrifying as a shot. Without a word they ran to answer her. She stood on the porch, bending a white face forward into the dusk. Her hands were locked together in front of her, to hold her quiet till they came.

"The general!" she cried, as Staige bounded up the steps. "The general!"

Staige and Gabrielle ran past her into the parlor. Shadows filled it, but a sound of heavy breathing guided them to the general, lying on the floor. Staige struck a match, and its flicker showed them the limp figure, the darkened face, and the fixed, unconscious eyes.

Gabrielle hurried away for lights and cold water. Peter and Lucy and the cook were huddled together in the dining-room, drawn by Miss Sarah's scream, but too much frightened to come farther. She gave them directions and hurried back.

Miss Sarah had come in, and stood near the general. "We were talking, and he grew — agitated" — she said — "and suddenly he fell here at my feet." She wrung her hands, and then buried her face in them, giving way to loud sobs. "I — I felt — as if I had struck him down," she gasped pitifully, for her calamity had shattered the reserve which was as much a part of her as the old-fashioned primness of her dress.

"Staige will take the general's horses, and go with Peter for the doctor," Gabrielle said, and drew her to a seat. "Peter does n't dare drive them, and Job is too slow. I know what to do until the doctor comes. You must not be frightened. He may be better very soon." She turned back to Staige. "You must go," she told him in a lower voice. "I have seen the general almost like this before, only Miss Sarah does n't know. There is n't much to be done except to get the doctor, and you will drive faster than Peter. He has gone to get the carriage."

"All right," Staige said. He gave a questioning, hopeless glance at Miss Sarah, and left the room.

Lucy and the cook came in with a mattress, and laid the general on it. Gabrielle bound his head in wet cloths, and raised it with pillows; she had the women bring warm irons for his feet and chafe his hands. He continued to breathe with a heavy labor which made his unconsciousness seem brutish and horrible. His face photographed itself on the girl's mind, and she knew that it would haunt her in moments of morbid weariness, appearing out of the dark when she longed for sleep; Miss Sarah's sobbing completed her sense of chaotic disorder and desolation.

She went to Miss Sarah and put a hand on her shoulder. "You *must* stop crying," she said. "What if the general were to come to, and hear you? It would make him worse again."

Miss Sarah controlled herself a moment, and looked up through the dimness of her tears. "Will he get better?" she asked.

"I don't know," Gabrielle answered. "We can only wait."

The older woman slipped to her knees, and bowed her head on her clasped hands. She was trembling violently and sobbing harder than before, and in broken, half-coherent words she began begging God for the general's life. Gabrielle stood by her side, hurt by the necessity which made her hear, inexpressibly pained and sympathetic, yet tingling with the con-

sciousness of the torture which would burn Miss Sarah's cheeks some time when she remembered. Through the broken apology and petition, she learned that the general had taken the time when she and Staige were in the garden to press his suit again, and Miss Sarah had again refused. There seemed to be no reason except the intangible one that she preferred his friendship to any closer relation, and she explained to God that the general had often said that it would kill him if she kept on refusing, but she had thought that it was only a part of his chivalry. This time he had cried out sharply, "You are leaving me to die alone," and had fallen at her feet. She huddled herself close to the chair, gasping and spent, while Gabrielle found the tears running down her own face, it was so terrible a thing to have happened to Miss Sarah. The colored women working over the general began to sob, and one of them prayed softly, begging the Lord to listen, and not leave her little mistress with a broken heart. Miss Sarah found articulate speech again, and in sharp moans, wrung by mental anguish out of physical exhaustion and suffering, she promised to marry the general if God would let him live. Gabrielle left her and stood by the general, finding his oblivion less hard to bear than Miss Sarah's convulsive pleading.

"What a strange thing it is," the girl

thought, "that she is willing to grant to him dying what she would never grant while he lived!"

She knew of nothing more to be done for the general, and she could only wait,—wait with an awed feeling that she was in the ante-room of the great chamber of decrees. Within it God sat in silence, pondering his answer to Miss Sarah's prayer. The beautiful dim night which breathed through the windows was his council room, and this small lighted space, crowded and audible with suffering, was no greater, compared to his domain, than the time of a single life is to eternity. But it was very terrible. Her thoughts went back to the city,—another, larger waiting room, with lights and hurrying figures, laughter, anguish, cries, timid innocence, and faithful wickedness,—it was all the same as here, with the great thoughtful silence on the other side the door; she could not straighten out the puzzle of it, but she saw that the small activities of her existence in the city would be no better a refuge from the solemnity of life than Miss Sarah's wakeful napping in the middle of the day. She had told Staige that she could not face his outlook, but perhaps it was all life that she shrank from, having had time in the quiet weeks to look deeper than ever before into its mystery.

The general's breathing grew easier. Lucy touched Gabrielle, calling her attention, and

she knelt beside him. His eyes were conscious, and haunted by the knowledge that he had been near to death.

"Miss Sarah will come to you," she said softly. "She will never leave you."

Miss Sarah hurried across the room, but paused, swaying, as she met the general's eyes. For a moment their imploring only made her remember that she would rather be his friend.

"You promised," Gabrielle whispered tensely, — "you promised God."

Miss Sarah drew her breath with a final sob, and pressed one frail hand tight against her heart. "I — promised," she murmured, and, dropping on her knees, she passed her arm under his head. Her soft wet cheek pressed his. She glanced up, wondering if the room and her old self could see, then bent again and kissed him. Death would part them soon, but in the sweetness of the moment lost peace came back to the general's face, and lost youth to hers. Gabrielle's heart seemed breaking as she left the room.

The white driveway led from the house, and she followed it. At the gate she paused, and held her head between her hands. Tears coursed down her cheeks, but she could not tell why she was crying. It was so strange and sad and holy just to live that every nerve quivered, and flashes of understanding kept

the pulse in her temples struggling like a bird beating its wings. She tried to brush the tears from her eyes and look up at the big kind stars, so full of perfect knowledge and of calm; but the stars blurred, and she bowed her head. A pause of weariness came to her, and through the hush of thought she heard a far-off rhythm of hoof-beats muffled in the sand. She did not stir, but her thought timed itself to the distant measure, and a cool air dried the tears upon her cheeks.

The sound grew closer and closer. She could not break the suspense by looking to see how close, but stood with her head bowed, waiting by the open gate. Wheels creaked through the sand. She heard Staige's voice, and looked up. The foam-flecked horses reared beside her, checked suddenly. Staige jumped from the carriage, and Peter drove on.

"The doctor was gone; he'll come as soon as he gets home," Staige said. "I hurried back to help" — There was dread and question on his face.

Gabrielle took a step toward him. "The general is better, Staige," she began tremulously, "but — oh, Staige, I have been waiting so long."

THE TINKLING SIMLINS

IT was admitted that there was no other man around North Pass who could get together so good a force of berry-pickers as Abe Tweedy, — or Twiddy, as he was known by word of mouth. He went out into the wilds of Johnson County to engage them in April; imported them to the Floyd farm, near the pass, in May, when strawberries were beginning to ripen; and “bossed” them with forceful patience and suavity until the last blackberry was off the vines in August. The inhabitants of “old Johnsing” were a lawless people in those days, but it was Tweedy’s boast that in ten years there had been no “killings” in his gang, and scarcely ever a fight or a drawn knife, while the quarreling was only enough to give a little human interest to the long, hard seasons. Year after year the same families joined his force. Friendships or jealousies which had been interrupted during the winter began afresh along the strawberry rows, and ran their course from the bleak, chilly, showery days when Tweedy kindled a bonfire on the edge of the field, so that his gang could warm its numbed hands and dry its dew-drenched

clothing, to other days of perfect sunshine and delight; and on to others still, when the aroma of the raspberries hung like an overpowering incense in the quivering air, and Tweedy advised the pickers to put moist raspberry leaves in their hats and bonnets to keep off the sun.

It was the beginning of such a day of fainting heat, and Tweedy had made the rounds of the field with a water-bucket and a dipper. He passed over a little rise of ground, and found himself near a girl who had fairly buried her head in the waving branches of a tall raspberry bush, and was searching for the great, red, perfect berries which grow beneath the leaves.

"Fine warm day," he said, setting down the bucket, and taking off his hat to wipe his forehead. The girl did not seem to hear, so he stood a moment looking at her. Her skirt was soaked to the waist with the heavy dew which shimmered on the leaves and berries, her sleeves were wet to the shoulders and clung about her strong round arms, and even the ruffle of her sunbonnet was limp from brushing against the vines. It was very early, although it was so warm. The sun was low in the east, and its light fell in an almost level flood of gold across the tops of the vines, which were all staked and trained high, so that the field looked like a vineyard. Far away toward the horizon, the morning shadows were still lurking among the wild blue hills. It seemed

a pity that the girl should be soaked with dew and have her head buried in a raspberry bush. Tweedy tried a new tone. "Look out you pick them berries clean, Cynthia Lence," he said.

She straightened herself, and pushed her bonnet back from a calm-looking face with moist curls flattened against the temples. "'Pears to me, when I stand on my haid in a bush, it's a sign I'm searchin' pretty close for 'em," she answered, freeing the curls with her hand.

Tweedy lifted the dripping dipper out of the bucket and held it toward her. "I knowed you would n't stop workin' long enough to take a drink 'less'n I faulted yore work," he said. "It ain't my place, as boss, to make a fuss about anybody's doin' too much; but jus' countin' myself as Abe Twiddy, I cain't sense why you drive yoreself so hard. If you want to show that you can pick two boxes to Buck Anderson's one, you done that long ago."

The girl had come a step toward him to take the dipper, but her hand dropped and she did not take it.

"Pshaw!" he said, holding it out farther. She shook her head. "Pshaw!" he repeated, "you're the faithfulest worker I've got in this field; you don't need any boss, an' someway I cain't never count myself as anything but Abe Twiddy when I'm talkin' to you. . . . Stan' still a minute; it's bound to be said. I cain't

help seein' that you-uns is workin' yoreself so unmerciful jus' because Buck Anderson married that old Widder Tate instead of you. He's a heap sorrier about it 'n you be, an' she's run him right up agin the wall, too; he das n't lift a eyelash 'less'n she says, 'Eyelashes up!' like we used to play. It don't look to me like there's the stuff in him for a girl to keer so much about."

The girl was looking at him so steadily that he began to hesitate. "You see, Cynthy, I'm a mighty old acquaintance of yorn," he apologized. "I been bossin' you now since you was jus' big enough to stan' under the raspberry vines an' pull the berries off'n the low branches; they mos'ly went into yore mouth, too. Now don't it look like it was tol'able nateral I should take an *interest*?"

She smiled at him with a sparkle of resentment in her eyes. "Nobody's keepin' you from takin' an *interest*, if you want to," she said. "I don't keer."

All the rugged lines in Tweedy's face took a sudden downward turn. He was not used to finding himself of small account, and if any one who cared had been watching him, it would have been evident that he was not only perplexed, but pained. At last he picked up the water-bucket and started along the row, but, pausing, looked at the girl again. She had bent into the bush once more, and he went

slowly away, feeling as if he had lost something there among the raspberry leaves.

The heat grew more oppressive as the day went on, and Tweedy noticed the listless, sullen spirit of his gang. The talk and laughter which usually passed between the rows died out, and only an angry mother raised her voice now and then to threaten a child, or Buck Anderson's wife (still known as "the Widow Tate") was heard railing at her husband. Tweedy himself was indefatigable in good works and in good cheer. He took the heavy hand-crates from the red-faced, panting children who were carrying them to the shed, and, as he passed, he stopped to joke with the row of old women who were playing truant openly and smoking their pipes in the shadow of a tree. But his jokes fell back on him like those of an actor who is facing a stolid house. There was no air stirring, the weight of the atmosphere rested heavy on the field, and all the time he was thinking of Cynthia with her head hidden in the raspberry bush. Again and again he started to go to see if she still had it there; but talking to her seemed so useless that he did not go until the whole force worked its way over the knoll which had separated her from the others, and he caught sight of her only a few bushes beyond the place where she had been before. She was picking as slowly and wearily as any of the rest, and he hurried toward her,

reproaching himself for having taunted her. After all, it was quite as much a pity for her to work slowly as to work swiftly on account of a man like Anderson, and he was ready to tell her so, when he noticed that Anderson and his wife were picking on the row next hers. Through all the season he had been quietly keeping them at a distance from her, but that morning she had come into the field so much earlier than any one else that she had already passed over the knoll when the others began, and so he had been careless in giving out the rows. Anderson's black head and thin shoulders were moving rapidly toward Cynthia, but his wife had come to a full stop, and was staring over the bushes at the girl, with a pair of cold blue eyes. Tweedy knew that the Widow Tate had more than once drawn a knife and attacked persons against whom she had a prejudice; and as she finally strode forward from one bush to another, he fancied he could see the swing of a knife in the limp folds of her gown; his thoughts followed her with foreboding, even while he called himself a fool, and took off his hat and fanned himself as if fanning up a new idea. The widow seemed to have seen all she wished to see of Cynthia, however, and Tweedy drew a breath of relief as he saw her fill the last box in her hand-crate and start off toward the shed. Tweedy hurried away, too, suddenly realizing that he was not

plain "Abe Twiddy," but a boss, and that this would be a good time to do a little bossing in the parts of the field at a distance from Cynthia; he called them "the far parts of the field."

Meanwhile, the pickers moved slowly along their rows, and the sun rose slowly higher and shot its rays at them with greater force. Cynthia could feel the sharp impact of the heat upon her head; she could feel, too, the strange piercing of an unseen steady gaze. Thinking the Widow Tate might still be looking at her, she tried to keep her own eyes doggedly upon her work; but at last she glanced up, and saw the widow's sunbonnet just passing out of sight on its way to the shed. It was Buck Anderson who was looking at her. She had not seen him so close at hand for nearly a year, and his haggard face startled her. It did not seem possible that this was the man with whom she had gayly "raced the field" last season; for though he might not have been a strong man then, he had been free and light-hearted. She had never seen a human soul in punishment before, and she took an involuntary step toward him, wonder and pity in her eyes.

Anderson glanced over his shoulder to be sure that his wife was out of sight, and then hurried toward her, shaking as if he had a chill.

"I've wanted a chance to talk to you," he began in a husky voice. "I pretty nigh died

las' winter, an' I'll die this winter, so I can talk where a well man would be obleeged to keep his mouth shet. After I had axed you-uns, an' you would n't have me, Cynthy, I was plumb wild; I did n't keer what I did, an' I jus' got married out of devilment, because I knowed folkses would say I'd throwed you-uns over to git the Widder Tate's wheat farm in the bottoms; an' I 'lowed it would spite you to have the name o' bein' cut out by the widder. I reckon she took me because she had seed how fast I could work, an' she allowed I'd make a right good hand on her farm an' hyar in the berry fields before wheat harvest; but she drove me too hard. I took a cold last winter"—He stopped with a sort of gasp from having said so much and spoken so rapidly. He seemed to have very little strength, and Cynthia noticed that he reeled slightly and put his hand to his head before he went on, while his eyes sought hers with a weak man's longing for compassion. "She drove me to work when I was n't fit," he began again, trying hard not to make each word an appeal. "I had had pneumony, an' goin' out like that I pretty nigh died."

Cynthia was struggling against the shock of the change in him. Her eyes roamed out across the field as she listened to his nervous, hurrying voice, and half consciously she noted how many of the pickers had stopped work to

stare across the walls of shimmering green, and wonder what her old lover was saying to her while his wife was gone. They were all like Tweedy: they thought that she had been mourning for him. She was glad that it was she who had borne the humiliation of their sympathy instead of Anderson, yet she resented their inquisitive interest and their theories. It was not her fault that a man too slight for her to love had loved her, though perhaps, if she had been thinking less of other things, she might have seen that he cared for her, and have kept him from caring quite so much; but she had thought of nothing except to be the best and swiftest picker in Abe Tweedy's gang.

"What made you work when you was n't fit?" she asked.

Anderson shook his head. "You-uns could n't onderstand it," he said wearily. "You-uns is one of the sort that jus' goes as they please, an' don't gee nor haw when folkses jerk the lines; but I'm mighty tender to the bit. I don' know how she did it, but she jus' slipped a curb into my mouth the first day, an' she's been a-gee-hawin' an' a-whippin' me up ever since. I 'lowed I would n't git the chance to say airy word to you-uns before I was drove onderground, an' I wanted to tell you that I only married for devilment, and she's paid me out — that's all."

He stopped, but his hollow, sorrowful eyes still lingered on the girl's face, and, for the first time in her life her heart admitted the claim of his unanswered love. Even his weakness suddenly became sacred from the judgment of her strength. Her face grew full of sorrow for him, but though her lips moved once or twice, she could not find a word to say. The silence of the breathless morning was so deep that she could almost hear what two women were whispering together in a row near by.

"Oh," Anderson began again in his hoarse, eager voice, "you don't lay up no grudge agin me, do you? I did it for devilment, but I've been paid out a'ready; an' when I think I've got to go on an' live with her till I die, an' have her stand by me then an' shet my eyes, I reckon I'll have paid more than the little spite it was to you to have a man you did n't keer for throw hisse'f away."

Cynthia went a step closer to him, regardless of the sharp laugh with which the women ended their conference in the other row. Her heart seemed to beat itself against a barrier of wordlessness. "Buck," she said, "I'm mighty sorry for you, an' if I've ever laid up any grudge or keered a little, it ain't anything beside what you've been through; an' I'll say it before my Maker, it's all my fault. I—I wisht there was something I could do."

Anderson looked at her, wondering if all the feeling in her face could be for him; and when he saw it really was for him, a sob came up into his throat, and with a single broken word he went back to his row.

Just then Tweedy came along, his water-bucket swinging at his side. "What's the matter?" he asked Cynthia. "You've scarcely moved a foot since I was talkin' to you an hour ago."

She smiled a little, and there was still something tender in her eyes. "'Pears to me you-uns is mighty hard to please to-day, Mr. Twiddy," she replied. "A hour ago you was faultin' me 'cause I picked too fast."

"Well, you *was* pickin' too fast," he said, and his voice was testy; "thar's a gait betwixt runnin' yore head off an' standin' still."

He had never spoken like that to her before, and she looked at him with a startled face. "I was tryin' to please you-uns," she began,—"that is, in the first place. Jus' the las' few minutes I been talkin' to Buck Anderson."

"So I've heard an' seen," he said. "The word of it is clear acrost the field."

Her features hardened. "An' you come acrost to stop it?" she inquired.

"Well, bein' the boss, I naterally have to come this way once in a while," he returned evasively, stooping to pull off a red berry she had missed. It did not prove to be as ripe as

he had thought. He jerked at it until it crumbled in his hand, and then laughed as he threw the pieces away. She watched him scornfully, but when he finally looked up at her, though his lips still laughed, his eyes were as frank and steady as her own. "I'm in an awkward place, Cynthy," he said. "I know you think I meddle too much, an' yet I'm bound to keep things as quiet an' peaceable as I can; an' somehow, I'm bound likewise to keep you from trouble, if I can. I know you call it yore own business if you choose to pass a word with Buck, same as if he was any other man, an' so 't is; an' yet this whole field has got its eyes open a-watchin', so whatever the Widder Tate don't see, she'll hear. You don't know her the way I do. I room next 'em in the barracks, an' I hear her goin' for him nights. She's the illest-natured woman I ever met up with, an' if she gets a notion that you an' him is takin' notice again, thar'll be the devil to pay. I wisht you'd promise me, Cynthy, not to speak him airy other word."

The girl shut her lips. "If thar's the devil to pay, I reckon them that owes him'll have to do it. I ain't never had no dealin's with him," she said.

"But that's the trouble with the old boy, Cynthy," the foreman explained. "He jus' collects whar he has a mind to, without lookin' at his books. An' thar's another thing,—

though it ain't easy for a man to name it to a honest girl that he's seed growin' up right out of the shadder of the vines, the way you have: even if the widder did n't jump on you with a knife some time when you was n't lookin', thar's nothin' like a fieldful of long-tongued berry-pickers to blacken a girl's name."

Cynthia set her hand-crate down very slowly under the bushes, and her hands fell by her sides. "Oh, Mr. Twiddy," she said, "do you think I keer? If they can make me black so easy, I'd ruther be made black an' have it done. I don't reckon such kind o' talk as theirs'll be heard at the jedgment seat more'n the rattlin' of a dry ole las' year's simlin full o' seeds. You know what the Bible says about them that have not charity,—they are become as soundin' brass an' tinklin' simlins. What do I keer if all their round simlin heads bob up an' rattle together all acrost the field?"

"Sist!" whispered Tweedy. There was a murmur in the air as if a breeze had arisen to shake all the pickers' tongues. Here and there heads leaned across rows to meet heads leaning from the other side. Some were turned to look at Cynthia and Tweedy, and at Anderson, who was walking in a queer dazed way beside his row, and picking scarce a berry. Others were looking with interest at the Widow Tate, as she marched heavily and slowly down the path from the shed.

Cynthia's lips curved disdainfully. "They had ought to thank me an' Buck," she said. "They ain't feelin' half so played out with the heat as they was a hour ago."

"Pore child!" Tweedy sighed, as if he were summing up all her waywardness and his pity for her. "You don't mind it very much now, an' you don't need to, 'cause it'll die out if it ain't fed; but cain't you pictur' how it ud be if it kep' on? I've had flies buzz about my head till I was nigh distracted, but I suppose you think it ud bemean you to take notice of a fly."

"I've heard 'em," Cynthia said. "They've kep' a buzzin' in my ears 'jus' the way you-uns does, an' whenever I brushed 'em off they'd come right back. Mr. Twiddy, you-uns is so skeered o' people's tongues, don't you reckon yore gang'll be puttin' our names together if you spen' so much time bossin' me, when I'm knowed to be the best an' fastest picker in the field?"

Her tone stung Tweedy, and for a moment a glow of resentment tried to fight its way through the sunburn on his face; but as he stared at her, seeking for a retort, and yet uncertain whether to retort or to turn on his heel, something spoke to him out of the unchanging depths of his tenderness for her, and he understood the burning of injustice, the suffering, and the humiliation which held council behind

her curving lips and brightened eyes. The anger died out of him, just as discord gives way to silence or to something sweeter, and he looked at the girl in a way that she could not understand. And yet there was nothing he could say to her, and he turned away, leaving her wishing that he had spoken, so that her own words might not sound so clearly in her ears.

The ripe berries were gleaming conspicuously along the row where Buck Anderson had hurried forward without picking them, and Tweedy, in his official character, could not pass them by. He walked swiftly from bush to bush, sweeping off a berry here and there as he passed, until he had a handful of the red, fragrant, half-melting jewels with which to accuse Anderson's carelessness; but Anderson was nowhere to be seen. Tweedy went on, glancing between the bushes; for he expected to find Buck stooping somewhere out of sight, picking from the low branches. Along the row from the other end the Widow Tate was approaching; she was looking for Anderson, too, her hard eyes resting an instant on every bush, seeking for some stir among the leaves. Presently she hurried forward, calling loudly, "What's the matter with you? What you doin' down thar?"

Tweedy came up and found her standing beside Anderson, who had fallen between the bushes and lay in their shadow. Something of

the green tint of the leaves was on his face, and he looked as if he were dead, but the widow did not kneel to touch him; she only bent, looking a little closer, and stirred him with her foot, repeating her questions.

Tweedy stooped, and passed a hand across his head and felt above his heart.

The widow straightened up and folded her arms. "He's only playin' off," she said. "He does hit when he gits tired o' work."

Several of the pickers had already gathered, and were elbowing one another around the two bushes which sheltered Anderson, but they waited for Tweedy to speak.

"I reckon it's sunstroke," Tweedy said. "We'll carry him straight to the barracks, Mis' Anderson, and put him in wet blankets. I don't know what the chances are, but I'm afeard"— He reached out for his water-bucket, and dashed its contents over Anderson's head and face.

"Oh, he'll git well," the woman said in her harsh voice, which was sometimes more cruel than her thought. "Hit takes a mighty little to git him down, an' a mighty lot to git him up; but he'll git well, an' I'll have him to nuss all through wheat harvest."

Cynthia had come up with the others, and when she saw Anderson the sunken blankness of his features appealed to all in her that was strongest and most gentle. After his wife had

spoken there was a moment of silence, and then Cynthia leaned toward Tweedy and said very slowly and clearly, "Let me watch beside him, so he'll not wake up to be twitted with the trouble that he's made. I'll take keer of him if he lives, an' if he don't live I'll not begrudge the time it took me to shet his eyes."

So many people had heard her that Tweedy could not ignore what she had said. "Don't be foolish, Cynthy," he answered quietly, although he felt outraged by her folly. "Mis' Anderson ain't goin' to grudge nothin' to the pore feller, now he's down. If you want to help, run to the shed and tell Mr. Floyd to send a man on horseback after the doctor."

Cynthia beckoned to a boy and sent him on the errand. Some of the men helped Tweedy to lift Anderson and carry him down the row; most of the pickers followed, and, with the green barriers on either hand to prevent straggling, the little procession started to leave the field. Cynthia fell into the line, but Anderson's wife stood at one side, like a spectator, her face and figure quite rigid except for the slow swelling of the veins upon her forehead. A report that she had stayed behind reached Tweedy, and he halted. "Come on, Mis' Anderson, an' git things ready for him!" he called back, trying to make his tone ignore Cynthia's interference; and then, more sharply, as the woman did not stir, "Come on!"

She came on with long, cumbrous strides, overtaking the bearers just as they left the field. "You-uns need n't call *me*, Abe Twiddy," she said, stepping into the foreman's path and confronting him with a heavy, quivering face,— "you-uns need n't call me to come an' nuss a man that married me to be took keer of, when his pore triffin' heart was bound up in Cynthia Lence. I've seed him stan' an' look at her acrost the rows. He would have took up with her soon or late, an' now that she's spoke like she did to spite me, I make her a free gift of him, alive or dead." She turned on Cynthia, who had come forward, with her head raised and her eyes sparkling, as if to accept the gift. "Oh, I know what's kep' you-uns from lookin' at him or speakin' to him all the season," she cried, — "you-uns has been afeard o' *me*; but now I take all these men an' women to witness that you need n't be afeard o' me no more. I'm goin' back to the bottoms to harvest my wheat, an' I make you-uns a free gift of him. Look at him, an' see if hit don't do you proud to git what you been seekin' fur so long."

Tweedy's eyes took fire. "Go," he said, — "go, Mis' Anderson, an' don't bring yore black heart acrost my path agin. You-uns has been tired o' yore bargain these months back, an' now yo're makin' a girl's quick speech the *ex*-cuse for throwin' off what you don't want onto

her, an' tryin' to put a slur onto her at the same time. I know yore kind. You git mad, an' then you make yore temper serve yore turn. Take yoreself out o' this field, but don't you let man, woman, or child hear you say that you gave yore husband to Cynthy Lence, or I'll see to it that yore tongue's stiffened so you cain't say it agin. I give you-uns, an' all you-uns that's listenin', to onderstand that, alive or dead, Buck Anderson is lef' with me."

He started forward, leaving the woman glowering after him on the edge of the field. Some of the pickers stayed with her, talking in an eager group; the others followed more silently towards the barracks. Cynthia walked beside Tweedy. "I thank you-uns for closin' her mouth," she said, "but I want to take keer of Buck, jus' the same."

"You cain't," said Tweedy shortly.

"But I want to," the girl insisted. "I—I owe it to him, Mr. Twiddy."

Tweedy had borne a great deal that day; the last shred of his patience was worn through, and his personal feeling was mingled in such an inextricable tangle with his duty that it seemed useless for him to try to tell what was the right thing to do, or to make a stand for doing it, even if he could decide. The girl was her own keeper, after all. "You know what yo're askin', an' what it means?" he said.

"I know that I'm askin' to do the las' thing that one human can do for another, Mr. Twiddy," Cynthia answered, looking at him as if she had suddenly grown older than he. "You-uns knows that Buck Anderson ain't goin' to git well."

Tweedy was too sorely tried to rise to what she asked of him. "We'll take him to his room, an' turn the widder's things out of it," he said gruffly, "an' you-uns can do as you please about sittin' thar an' keepin' watch."

"Thank you, Mr. Twiddy," the girl said, with a deference that was galling after she had made her point.

When they reached the long, many-roomed shed known as the barracks, Tweedy turned upon his troop of curious-eyed, pushing, busy-tongued retainers almost as if he saw for the first time that they had left the field. "We don't want no crowdin' an' gabblin' here," he said sharply. "Me an' Cynthy is all that's needed, an' out yonder the berries are meltin' on the vines. Go back to yore rows an' work yore peartest till I come an' give you the news. If the Widder Tate is hangin' around tell her to yoke up her oxen an' git. She'll find her plunderment lyin' here outside the door." He and the men who were helping him laid Anderson down on a straw pallet, and then he started off to the well for water to keep up the cold drenching which had been his first thought

in the field ; the others went with the retreating gang of pickers back to their work.

As Cynthia watched them go, and waited for Tweedy to come back with his unfailing, practical water-buckets, she seemed bitterly unneeded. Anderson might never return to consciousness ; and even if he wakened, the mere absence of his wife would be more than he had hoped for as a final grace. The murmuring of voices died away as the pickers ambled out of her hearing, but she knew that, freed from Tweedy's presence and her own, every tongue was unbridled out there among the raspberries. In spite of Tweedy's championship there would be no more escape from comment than from the heat that was glimmering everywhere, — over the green fields and the dry ploughed ground, and far over the faint, quivering, shadowless hills. Even the few, like Tweedy, who would take her part against the others would be convinced that she had defied Anderson's wife from love of Anderson ; and as she stood there waiting, she went down into that place of regret and futile rebellion where generous natures sometimes pay the price of their unselfishness, and the tears that start burning toward the eyelids freeze before they fall. Then Tweedy came hurrying from the well, and the fight for Anderson's useless life began.

The doctor came late and went quickly, leav-

ing no encouragement behind him ; and as all effort to revive Anderson grew into the conscientious formality with which the living strive to detain the dying, even when their engagement with death is inevitable, Tweedy in his turn began to feel useless in the room. The persistence with which Cynthia knelt beside the unconscious man compelled Tweedy to defer to her, and he left her frequently to go out and supervise the field. In one of his absences Cynthia heard a stir outside, and, glancing up, saw the Widow Tate and a few companions coming up the slope toward the barracks, trying to prod the inertia out of a pair of oxen who had been in pasture and were loath to change their way of life. Cynthia did not look again, but she was acutely conscious of every motion that was made and every word that was spoken while the oxen were yoked to a heavy lumber wagon, and the scanty and disordered furnishings outside the door were gathered up. A shadow darkened the doorway, and the girl knew that some one was standing there with arms akimbo, and looking at her. Other shadows came in silence ; then there was a hoarse laugh, they all turned away, and Cynthia heard the widow clamber into her wagon and crack her whip like a man ; the wagon-wheels began to creak, and finally to rattle, as the weight of the wagon urged the oxen into a rapid pace downhill.

Twilight fell at last like an absolution for the tortured spirit of the day. Even the voices of the pickers were hushed to a sort of peace, as they straggled in from work, and began to build little outdoor fires that sparkled brightly in front of the barracks, under the shadow of the trees. The women bent over the fires, cooking, and voice called to voice, asking or offering the commonplace services of life, but with unusual gentleness, as people speak when at any moment a guest may enter. Tweedy neither stayed long with Cynthia nor was long absent, but guarded her in every way and saw that she needed nothing. When twilight had changed to night, and the little evening fires had all gone out, except here and there a coal that blinked like a red glow-worm in the dark, he stood beside her for a little while, looking down at her and at Anderson. The thought of himself had yielded utterly to a great compassion for the sad ending of their love. Anderson would die that night, and he could not bear that Cynthia should feel that even the kindest eyes were watching her, unless she wished it, when the final renunciation came.

"Do you want me to stay with you?" he asked, after a time. "If I don't stay, I'll be right next door, an' I'll hear if you even tap on the wall. I thought perhaps you'd ruther be alone."

As the girl looked up at him, the lamplight

glistened upon teardrops in her eyes. "Thank you, Mr. Twiddy," she answered, — "you-uns is mighty kind. I'd ruther be alone."

Tweedy hardly knew what he did. He stooped suddenly and kissed her forehead. "You pore child !" he whispered, and left the room.

During the long hours of the night Cynthia had the long years of her future for companionship. The white moonlight came in at the doorway, and crept toward Anderson, and finally retreated, fearing to intrude. Once or twice she heard Tweedy get up from his bed, and pace softly back and forth in his room, and with the knowledge that he was awake her longing for his companionship grew almost into a cry. Once she went to the door and looked out over the lonely raspberry field, where a thin white fog had settled under the moonlight ; but the breath of it was cold, and she feared that Anderson might open his eyes and not find her, if his soul returned to ask for a farewell, before it went upon the way which it was seeking in the dark.

A change had come over him even in the moment she was gone. He breathed in sharper and more infrequent gasps, and the lines of death had sunk deeper in his face. She bent above him, watching with such intense sympathy that her own breathing seemed almost linked with his, as she waited for each throe,

thinking that each would be the last. But with the tenacity of feebleness his life fought on and on. At last, quite unexpectedly to herself, Cynthia tapped upon the wall. Tweedy was with her in an instant; and when she reached out a trembling hand, he took it without a word, and they watched together while the gray light of morning gradually dispelled the moonlight, and on until full dawn, when Anderson died.

Cynthia knelt beside him for a little while, but she did not need to close his eyes, for they had not opened to look at her. It was as if, at the moment when he turned away from her in the field, he had known that he had all it was right for him to claim, and his heart had been too full to ask for more.

Tweedy stood apart and waited until she came to him. Then they went outside. There was no stir yet about the barracks, for the overworn pickers were sleeping beyond their usual time. The sun had not risen, but its clearly drawn rays spread like a crown above the eastern hills, and the sky was scintillant. Only the lower hills and the deep green valleys lay shadowless and still in the diffusion of brightness, like a child's features that are waiting solemnly for life to set its seal of character upon them.

Tweedy broke the silence in a low voice. "I spoke hard to you-uns yesterday, more 'n

once, Cynthy," he said, "but I want you to forget it all, if you can. I was only wantin' to see you as happy as you had a chance to be; but now that I see how much deeper yore mis'ry was than I reckoned, thar ain't nothin' but sorrow for you in my heart — an' love."

The last word was spoken so gently, so much as an added tenderness, that it could not have pained or offended the deepest sorrow, yet Cynthia was startled by it. She looked at him curiously. "You-uns does well to pity me," she said. "I don't keer what all the others says an' thinks, but I want you-uns to know the truth, 'cause you won't be oncharitable, even to Buck. I ain't never loved him. It was him loved me."

Tweedy passed his hand across his brow. "You-uns did it all for a man you did n't love," he exclaimed, — "you dared all them tongues?"

She nodded. "I — I owed it to him. Without knowin', I had led him on."

Tweedy looked off over the hushed, expectant earth. "My God," he said softly, "what would you do for the man you loved?"

The girl's breath came in an unexpected sob. "Oh, Mr. Twiddy," she faltered, "I might have to tell him so. He might n't know it for hisse'f."

Tweedy turned. Her face was tremulous, but consecrated by the love which she had

hidden for so long ; and as their eyes met they forgot that there was anything but love in all the world. The glory brightened in the east, and the air stirred like an awakening along the fields. One after another the sleepy pickers came out of the barracks, saw the two figures below them on the hillside, and whispered back and forth with brightening eyes.

At last Tweedy put her gently away from him. "I had ought to go an' call the gang, an' tell them that pore Buck is gone."

Cynthia glanced over her shoulder and laughed as she saw the pickers bending discreetly to kindle their morning fires. "The simlins has been watchin'," she said, "an' they'll be tinklin' peartly to-day. Do you keer?"

Tweedy shook his head. Before them sunshine and shadow flashed like a smile across the earth, as the sun rose over the distant hills.

THE FIRST MRS. KEENER

MRS. GRAYSON'S horse was named Aaron, and people with a vague biblical knowledge had an idea that it was in some way appropriate, for they associated the name of Aaron with a rod, and Mrs. Grayson with the proverb in regard to sparing the rod. The connection was not very closely linked, but it always came into Willie de Ferriere's mind when he saw his mother-in-law belaboring Aaron into a stiff-jointed trot, while she sat bolt upright in the carriage flapping the lines with her driving hand. He knew then that something had happened, or somebody had made a remark in Pontomoc, and Mrs. Grayson was either hastening to the scene of action to take command, or leaving it to give an itemized account of the occurrence to all the people who had kept out of the way because they were not interested.

Willie de Ferriere escaped, if possible, whenever Aaron's blazed nose poked itself appealingly over the top of the De Ferriere gate, and Mrs. Grayson's voice disturbed the silence of the Point, calling for some one to come and let her in. There was always time to escape, for old Ann, the cook, saw to it that the gate was

never opened with undignified haste. One day Aaron's nose appeared, and Mr. Willie disappeared, going down the sheltered path which led to the bayou landing. Ann was so very slow about the gate that Mrs. Grayson was still flushed from calling when she reached the house.

"I wish you would let *me* train your servants for you, Juanita," she said to her daughter. "I was tempted to get out and open the gate myself. If you knew what I'd come to tell you, you would n't have let me wait so long. Not that it will please you," she added. "I knew you would live to repent of throwing over George Keener to marry a poor man, and I told you so at the time."

Juanita lifted her eyebrows. "You told me a good many things at that time that haven't come true," she said.

"Well, this has come true," Mrs. Grayson declared. "Mr. Keener has come back from Mexico richer than before, and a widower. You see he did n't break his heart for you after all."

"Why, mamma, I did n't expect him to break his heart," Juanita said, with a little appeal of gravity which was lost upon her mother. Mrs. Grayson was warm and tired; under those conditions she was always sure that Juanita's motives had been bad; but Juanita could not help trying to escape from the ground of censure and retort. "If I had thought he would

break his heart" — she went on, tying Aaron in the shade of a live oak while her mother descended heavily from the buggy — "if I had n't been sure that he would love some other girl just as well, it would n't have been so easy to tell him never to come back for me after he had postponed our wedding-day. But I knew he would soon care for some one else. I'm sorry that she died."

"But she has left him an immense fortune!" Mrs. Grayson exclaimed. "He was well off before, but now his wealth is fabulous, and I reckon he has come back looking for a second wife. I hope some girl right here in Pontomoc will snap him up, so that you can see what you have missed."

"But, mamma" — Juanita began, and then she sat down on the doorstep and laughed until old Ann's mahogany face came peering around the side of the house to see what had happened. "Don't you see, mamma," she said at last, "if I had married him when you wanted me to there would n't have been any rich wife to die and leave him a fortune — even if I had died it would n't have put a penny in his pocket."

Mrs. Grayson looked blank for a minute, and then she saw her way. "You talk like a child!" she asserted. "He had plenty of money in the first place, and if his wife had n't left more to him he would have made it. He's that kind of a man, while Willie de Ferriere" —

"Is another kind, and I thank God for it!" Juanita broke in. "Where shall we keep coolest—out here on the gallery or in the house?"

"In the house, where the reflection of the water won't blind us," Mrs. Grayson chose. "It's very evident he's looking for a second wife," she went on more placidly, as they sat down in Juanita's shady room and a caressing breeze from the bay touched her warm cheeks. "I hear he has called at the Hollingsworth's twice already, and since Dorothy is married, and Louise engaged, and Jessamine in short dresses yet, it must be that Dabney takes his fancy. She is very much such a girl as you were six years ago."

"But, mamma, his wife can't have been dead very long," Juanita protested, "and the Hollingsworths are old friends of his."

"Old friends sometimes make young wives," Mrs. Grayson returned sagely. "Wait and see."

It was not long before Mrs. Grayson was able to point out to Juanita that Mr. Keener was calling on Dabney Hollingsworth every day. "The wedding will be about October—you'll see," she declared.

Dabney was a slender, girlish thing, and everybody began to wonder what she found attractive about old George Keener, except the money in his pockets. People were slow

in saying that she liked him on account of his money, for Dabney did not seem like that kind of girl, yet it was hard to find any other cause. It was not so much that Keener was old, though he and her father had played marbles together before the live oaks which shaded the Pontomoc streets were planted, and the live oaks had been growing for forty years. It was more that he had never been young. He was one of those men who have changed from large-faced, sober-minded infants into slow-motioned, sober-minded boys, whose mission in life is to make bad boys seem attractive, and thus preserve to them their due portion of love; afterward, and still with sobriety, they grow slowly into men.

At fifty, George Keener looked just as he had looked at five months, even to the baldness above his large, round forehead. But he had learned to talk, and in his ponderous way he talked rather well. More adventures had come to him in the past six years than usually come to such quiet people, and in Pontomoc a man who has had adventures does not lack Desdemonas to listen to his accounts of them. In the evenings Dabney liked to sit on a low step of the gallery and watch the moon steering along the deep blue channel of the sky between the white clouds, while he talked. She was the foolish, romantic one of the four girls, and her head held enough girlish notions

of an old-fashioned kind to hide the pompous commonplace of a less interesting man than Keener. Perhaps, too, she was intuitive enough to feel that he was rather a good and gentle man, and certainly she was flattered by receiving the attention of the man whom all Pontomoc delighted to honor. Dabney's sisters and her brother-in-law shook their perplexed heads and let matters alone.

It was not long before the engagement was announced, and, as Mrs. Grayson had said, the wedding was set for October. Pontomoc society fluttered with excitement, arranged the programme of a life of ease and beneficence for the two after their marriage, decided that they should live mainly in Pontomoc, and began to talk of "our esteemed fellow-citizen, George Keener," in the local paper. As for Mr. Keener, he was ponderously content, and in his complaisance he developed a new conversational tendency, and began referring frequently to his dead wife. The prospect of giving her a successor seemed to enable him to mention her calmly, and he antedated matters by speaking of her as the first Mrs. Keener. People were startled when they heard the phrase for the first time, but at the Hollingsworths' they did not mind it so much the first time as they did the fortieth. Dabney was the only one who did not fume about it; the others marveled at her. If she was an-

noyed in any way she showed no sign of it, but seemed to live in a gentle day-dream in which the first Mrs. Keener took part as naturally as any actor.

The long Pontomoc summer crept past, and people grew pale and nervous under its continued strain. There were no single overpowering days like those of the hottest weather in the north, but from April till October there was an unbroken monotony of heat. Every one noticed that Dabney Hollingsworth was looking very worn, and her sisters knew that she was irritable. One evening, when a storm was coming up, she and Keener sat down on the pier-head watching the restless fishes stir the phosphorescence in the water. Neither of them had spoken for a long time, and Keener felt that he ought to break the silence, so he began : —

“The first Mrs. Keener used to say” —

Dabney lifted her head ; her face was very white in the dusk. “I have a favor to ask of you,” she said distinctly.

“A favor ?” he repeated. “Why, you know if there is anything I can do for you” —

“There is,” she said. “To be engaged is not the same as being married. I am willing to hear anything you wish to tell me about your wife, but until you have married a second time I wish you would stop referring to her as the *first* Mrs. Keener.”

"Dabney!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I know I have kept so quiet about it that you thought I did n't care, and at first I did n't care very much, because—well, your love for her interested me. Now I'm tired of it. I'm not sure that I care to marry a man who has been married before. Even if you stop talking about it, you have ground it in until I can never forget that there was a first Mrs. Keener."

He got up and paced the pier-head. "This is a sudden turn," he said.

"No, it's not sudden," she declared. "Did you imagine that any girl would like to marry a man who kept talking about another woman all the time?"

"Why—I—I had n't thought of it," he answered slowly. "When I mentioned the—the first Mrs. Keener before our engagement you seemed interested in her."

"Yes; I was a little fool."

He paused in front of her, and she saw that his features had a strained look, like those of a big, sober-minded child whose face is slowly forming itself for tears. "Dabney," he expostulated, "I don't understand what you mean, talking like this. If I have annoyed you, you have only to tell me so and I will stop. If you have been annoyed, why have n't you told me so before? You know I would n't consciously do anything to hurt you."

Somewhere in an obscure corner of her heart Dabney was sorry for him, but the mood which changes patience into bitterness urged her on. "There are some things which a man must know without telling if he is to make a woman happy," she declared. "I did n't realize, myself, how unbearable it was until you had overdone it past remedy. After all you've said, I could n't be happy with you or any man who had been married before. I should feel that you were comparing me to your first wife all the time."

He sat down across from her and rested his head in his hands. She heard him sigh once, and then everything was quiet except a single breath of land breeze whispering something in a pine-tree top. Dabney's nerves quivered, and she looked intently across at Keener. He was short and middle-aged and heavy. She felt as one does who has had a beautiful thought in the night and wakes to find it commonplace. It seemed as if she had never seen the man before, and she wondered how he could have interested her. It occurred to her that she must be far more fickle than other women, and that he would be justified in telling her that the first Mrs. Keener always formed an unbiased opinion at the commencement of an acquaintance and then never changed.

It was horrible of him to keep silent. There

seemed to be nothing more that she could say, but she gave a nervous, bitter little laugh, recognizing that she was possessed by a desire to draw him out a little more about the first Mrs. Keener. He spoke to her without looking up. "Is that final, Dabney?" he asked, with the ghost of his usual ponderous tone. "Have you fully decided that you cannot marry any man that has been married before?"

She caught a sharp breath, thinking of all the stir that there would be in Pontomoc. "Yes," she said.

He rose, crossed the little space between them, and stopped in front of her. "Then I have something to tell you, Dabney," he began in a trembling voice. "I have never been married in my life."

She drew herself a little farther from him and looked at him a long time. He was not the man to trifle or lay a trap of words to catch her feelings in. He seemed excited and half-exultant. "Either you have lied before or you are lying now," she said harshly.

"Wait a minute; let me tell you about it" — his voice bungled with the words. "I — I did lie, if you call it so, but I did n't think it would do any harm. I — I did n't dream, you know, of getting engaged to anybody when I first came back. I — I only wanted — I thought it would appear — well, less as if I had been hurt" — he stopped, with all he meant to say

sticking in his throat. His fat hands were locked in front of him.

Dabney rose. "Do you mean?" she asked, "that you made all this up because—because you wanted to show Juanita de Ferriere that you did n't mind her throwing you over that— that time?"

He straightened himself, swallowing all the justifications which he could not speak. "That's what I mean," he said.

"And those other things you told about your adventures— were those lies, too?"

He gasped a little. "They—they had a foundation"—

"They were lies," Dabney asserted, and he clutched his hands together more tightly; there was something hard and ungirlish in her voice. "They were lies, and you began telling them to me so that they would be repeated, and Juanita de Ferriere would hear."

The little breeze which had been in the pine tops had reached the water and was tracing ripples of silvery phosphorescence across the dim shadows of the bay. The ripples stole up with an almost soundless whisper and died upon the beach. Keener glanced over his shoulder, as if they had spoken to him, but he said nothing.

"And when you saw that I listened and believed, you found the telling pleasant in itself, and you began to think that you could show

Juanita still more plainly that you did n't care by making love to me before her eyes. And I" — she buried her face in her hands. "Oh," she sobbed, "I thought I had made you forget Juanita and your wife and all in love for me. And then, when we were engaged, and you began talking of your wife all the time, I — I told myself not to be jealous of the dead — and there was n't any dead. There was nothing but a lie."

She stood sobbing in the dusk, and he felt bewildered and chagrined and awkward. "Dabney," he said at last, "I think you are making a good deal too much of this. I — I only told you because you did n't want to marry a widower. And, don't you see, nobody but us two need ever know."

He tried to put his hand on her shoulder, but she flung it off. "Do you think I am likely to tell?" she demanded. "Do you think I want the world to know how I've been fooled? and to hear Mrs. Grayson talk about it the rest of my life? No, you will pack up your things and leave Pontomoc, and people may think we have quarreled, or anything they please."

"But — good Heavens, Dabney, don't you see that I can't do that?" he cried. "I can't be jilted again the way Juanita jilted me, right here in her sight. I — Dabney!"

"Do you think I care?" the girl asked, and her voice told him how every nerve and muscle

in her stiffened against his appeal. "Have you treated me well enough for me to care how you are humbled before Juanita? You deserve it, too. You've done all this to be revenged on her."

"You don't know how she hurt me," Keener pleaded; "and if that was all in the beginning, it is not all now. I have become more than reconciled. When I analyze my affections" —

"When you analyze your affections, you want to lie, and have me keep your secret," Dabney broke in. She caught her breath and waited an instant. Keener tried to laugh. There were tones in her voice which he had never expected to find there. She stood before him, no longer dreamy eyed and hanging on his words, but a slender, erect, accusing woman, before whom he felt bewildered and desperately unhappy and cowed. He crushed his straw hat in his hands.

"I said I did not want the world to know what a fool I had been," she went on; "but after all, it's you who fear the world, not I. I despise it, and to show you how I despise it I promise you this: If you ever speak to me of our engagement, or trouble me in any way again, I'll tell the world — I'll tell Mrs. Grayson — about the first Mrs. Keener, and I'll tell Juanita first of all."

Keener shrank back a step, letting the relics of his hat drop at his feet. "But —

Dabney," he began huskily, "you don't mean — you can't be so hard on me — I — nothing has changed in my feeling toward you" —

Dabney's slender, white-clad figure went glimmering along the pier. "Dabney!" he called, running after her; "at least let us walk up together. Your sisters might notice" —

The girl paused a moment. "Stay where you are," she said. "You may come up after I have gone in the house."

He sat down limply on one of the seats, and Dabney passed on along the pier, and under the rustling live oaks, and through the garden where the sun had burned out nearly all the flowers. Her face was set in hard lines, and her hands were clenched in mortification for the past.

Five minutes afterward Keener followed, tiptoeing through the yard, glancing furtively at the dark gallery where the family usually spent the evenings; there was nobody in sight and he blessed all his saints. He thought he would take the night train without bidding any one good-by, and leave Dabney to face the explanations as she pleased; but he was too late for the night train, and next morning the accents and image of her scorn had faded somewhat from his mind. When he thought it all over he found himself in a boiling rage because a girl had presumed to lay down the law to him, and, without knowing exactly how he should

do it, he decided to go back to her and batter down the conditions she had made. Having come to a decision, he waited until afternoon, not to seem too eager, and when he had finally started, fate placed Mrs. Grayson and her slow-going horse, Aaron, as a barrier in front of him where the road was too narrow for one carriage to pass another unless the first drove far to one side.

Mrs. Grayson turned and greeted him. "Curb your eagerness," she said, with that genial superiority which people employ toward lovers. "At his best, Aaron moves as if the snails were after him, but Dabney is not going to run away from you. I'm grateful to the narrowness of the road, myself."

She beamed upon him and seemed to have no thought of urging Aaron to any greater speed. Keener's face turned red.

"It is I who have cause to thank the road," he answered shortly.

The crumbs of compliment which had fallen within Mrs. Grayson's reach of late had been small. She identified this one, but, regretting its size, retorted with a mixture of acidity and archness: "Poor Mr. Keener; it's heartless of me not to whip up Aaron, but everybody takes the liberty of trying to educate an engaged man in patience. There's no telling how many times Dabney will delay you."

Keener fidgeted with the reins, and tried to

remember where the road broadened so that he could pass. It was certainly just around the corner made by the Saunders' pecan grove. He tried to smile. "You know human nature, Mrs. Grayson," he said. "If more people took your advice they'd be happier afterward."

The color deepened in her face. She was intensely gratified. "It has to be admitted for you, Mr. Keener, that it is n't your fault that you did n't follow my advice at a time which we both remember," she declared.

The broadening of the road came into view. Keener gathered up his reins and his whip. "I feel that I have a friend in you," he said cordially, "and some day when I'm less in a hurry I want to ask your advice."

Mrs. Grayson gathered up her reins, reached forward for her whip, and jerked the bit in Aaron's mouth, without taking her eyes from Keener.

Keener lifted his hat. "Good-day," he said. He touched his horse with the whip-lash, and would have passed, but something excited Aaron. Mrs. Grayson turned and gave full attention to her horse. For an instant the two animals were neck and neck, then the road narrowed again, and Keener fell behind. He dropped his whip into its socket and mopped his brow. Mrs. Grayson was sawing at Aaron's mouth, although Aaron had subsided to a walk.

"I think he must have been raced when he

was younger," she stated calmly. "He is slow enough, ordinarily, but sometimes when another horse tries to pass I can't control him."

Aaron looked over his shoulder in surprise, and Mrs. Grayson jerked his head straight again unamiably, as if she thought him about to speak.

Keener was still working with his handkerchief. The road was consistently narrow from that point to the Hollingsworth gate. He began to lose his confidence of making an impression on Dabney. As likely as not Mrs. Grayson would turn in at the Hollingsworths', too, and make a call. He could feel her looking from his face to Dabney's, and then going to tell Juanita. "Horses are — are unaccountable," he suggested.

"Less so than men," Mrs. Grayson said, while Aaron shambled forward, looking critically at the herbage on the roadside.

"Yes," Keener agreed; "less so than men." It seemed to him that he was talking to Mrs. Grayson on more equal ground than he had ever felt between himself and Dabney, or even Juanita. She had been on his side in the affair with Juanita, and he began to feel that she would be on his side now if she knew. The thought led him toward confidence. "Take my own case," he began, but the words dried on his lips. After all, his own case was far too desperate to talk about.

Mrs. Grayson leaned still farther out of the carriage back. "Do you know, George," she said, "when you first came back and I heard you had called at the Hollingsworths', I told Juanita you would fall in love with Dabney. It was at first sight, was n't it?"

Keener shook his head. His eyes protruded with misery. "Gradual," he mumbled; "it came gradually."

Mrs. Grayson had not been a lover's confidante for years. It pleased her to the heart. "There's one thing I've often wanted to ask you," she went on. "Did she attract you first by reminding you of Juanita, or the first Mrs. Keener?"

Keener turned a deep crimson. He dropped the reins and pulled his hat on with both hands. It was not the hat he had worn the night before, but it seemed likely to suffer in a similar cause. His voice stuck in his throat.

"Ah — neither!" he gasped.

"Oh," Mrs. Grayson commented, "I thought perhaps it might have begun that way." She noticed the agitation of his face. "You were very fond of your first wife, were n't you, George? Do you know, you have never told any of us what she looked like. Would you mind?"

He glanced up and down the road. No one was coming from either way. A deep blue sky hung close above the pine treetops. The air

was full of the scent of pine and myrtle leaves, and so warm that it smelled as if their spices had been burned. It was quiet and secluded enough to warrant confidences, even between carriages driving tandem. "Let us speak of something else," he begged.

Mrs. Grayson had never seen him in a mood like this before. He had refused to be drawn out in regard to Dabney, and he refused to describe the first Mrs. Keener. "Well, what do you want to talk about?" she asked blankly.

Keener took the whip out of its socket, slipped it back again, and met her glance. His mind was devoid of topics. "Let's talk about — you," he said.

It was so unexpected that her eyes fell. "Why, George," she murmured, "nobody's interested in me."

Her confusion was salve to Keener's injured pride. He lifted his hat and let it settle more easily upon his forehead. "I am interested in you," he hazarded. "When I — when I analyze my feelings I find that I have been interested in you a very long time."

The high color faded a little out of her cheeks, and she looked younger for the change. "Yes, we're very old friends," she said, "and, George, I can't help seeing that you're not happy to-day. Has anything come between you and Dabney?"

Keener settled his coat-sleeves over his cuffs.

It seemed odd to him that he should have felt so desperate a little while before. "That little affair is ended," he announced. "She is too young to be a companion for a man. Now you" —

"George," she broke in, "I know what it is to have lost a companion that I loved. Are you sure that I could take the place of the first Mrs. Keener?"

The perspiration gleamed on Keener's cheeks. "Oh, quite so; don't mention it," he urged. Dabney had said that no girl would like to marry a man who kept talking about another woman, but Mrs. Grayson persisted in dragging forward the first wife whom he had never had and thought it would be wise to forget. "Don't mention it," he repeated. "We will just start fresh as if nothing had happened. I — I think it's the happier way."

"Now, look here," Mrs. Grayson rejoined, with a shade of disapproval in her voice, "we're both middle-aged people, and it's useless for us to pretend that this is the beginning of our lives. I'm very fond of you, and always have been, but I should n't be honest if I claimed to have the same sort of a feeling for you that I had for Mr. Grayson. I've always told Juanita that no one should take her father's place, but of course things are different now that she is married and I am left alone."

Keener chirruped uneasily to his horse,

though it had its nose almost in Mrs. Grayson's face. Things were certainly different with him, too, since Juanita had married ; and as for Mr. Grayson's place, he had never known that Mr. Grayson had a place except in the graveyard. Mr. Grayson had died long ago, and had been forgotten, apparently ; Keener had an idea that he had been as silent and unobtrusive as his portrait, which hung in Mrs. Grayson's parlor, carefully obscured with net. But Mrs. Grayson had been holding him in reserve, it seemed.

The thought of Mr. Grayson's portrait had come to her, too, by one of those coincidences which are so much more natural than strange.

"Take my word for it," she went on, putting aside the nose of Keener's horse with her hand, "the happier way is to be perfectly frank with each other, and not to ignore the past. Now I should not be content without Mr. Grayson smiling down at me out of his picture, just as he has done for twenty years, and I know that you will want a picture of the first Mrs. Keener somewhere in sight ; they can hang on opposite sides of the room."

Keener looked at her with an expression which she could not understand. Family portraits are as easily acquired as memories ; he knew that Dabney could be trusted, and the habit of referring to the first Mrs. Keener was a very pleasant one. Mr. Grayson would seem

less lonely, too, with a companion piece upon the wall. A sense of humor which was rare to him made him happy with its implication of superior knowledge and worldliness. He inclined his head. "My dear Mrs. Grayson, you are generous, and you know the human heart," he declared; "but let me assure you that in my affection there will never be any difference between you and the first Mrs. Keener."

She flushed and turned away abruptly, so touched that she did not want him to see her face.

"You 'll drive right along with me," she said over her shoulder, "and we 'll tell Juanita."

She lifted her whip and flapped the lines over Aaron's back. Aaron roused himself into a rapid, stiff-kneed trot; Keener's horse pricked up his ears and followed — just as his master was to follow for the rest of his life. A slight exhilaration filled Keener. This was a very different outcome from anything that he had planned, but it would show Dabney and Juanita their in consequence. Mrs. Grayson was called aggressive, but in his experience she had always been aggressive on his side, and her views of life were reasonable, instead of hysteric, like a girl's. He even felt a comfortable assurance that he could tell her his secret, if he chose, without its shocking her as it had shocked Dabney. Still it was far better to

keep the secret as an offset to the revival of Mr. Grayson.

He blinked suddenly. Bars of sunshine falling through the shadow of a high picket fence which inclosed the Hollingsworth place struck across his face as if each picket had leaped forward and given him a blow. Dabney and Juanita came out of the Hollingsworth gate, starting for the village. Keener set his feet hard against the dashboard, and held one hand in readiness to lift his hat. He was glad that Mrs. Grayson was in advance to decide what to do. He wondered if she would rein in, then and there, to announce the news.

For once Mrs. Grayson was content to let appearances tell their own tale. She glanced back to see that Keener was safe and close behind. Then she flapped the lines over Aaron's back, and leaned out of her buggy in passing.

"Good-day, Dabney, my dear," she said. "Juanita, George and I are going to your house, but you need n't hurry back. We can entertain each other."

Keener lifted his hat without a word, and their buggy wheels rattled ostentatiously over the hard shell road. Juanita stared after them in amazement. Dabney dug her parasol into the shells.

"My engagement with Mr. Keener is broken," she explained.

"Oh!" Juanita said. She drew the girl toward her, and their eyes met in an understanding of what they had each escaped.

"And mamma is comforting him," Juanita added. She sat down under a tree and began to laugh. "Oh, thank the Lord!" she said; "thank the Lord!"

Dabney did not laugh; her pride was too sore; but she smiled a little as she watched the two equipages sweep up to the De Ferriere gate.

"Ann!" Mrs. Grayson called.

Keener made a motion as if to climb down and open the gate. Mrs. Grayson turned and checked him.

"Ann!" she called again.

“HEARTSEASE”

I

AN old-fashioned, low-bodied carriage wound slowly uphill between the spreading cotton fields of Heartsease plantation. On the backward-facing seat were Judge Courteney and his daughter Joyce; opposite to them sat his wife and his sister-in-law, Miss Mathilde Dabney. The older ladies were dressed in dimly flowered lawns, according with the Indian summer of their years, and with the warm, hazy, autumn sunshine. Joyce — Joy, they called her — was in white, a thin white through which her rounded arms showed as through a mist, and above which her face rose clear, dark, impatient, touched with suffering, and out of all keeping with her name.

Mrs. Courteney smoothed her soft mauve and smoke-colored draperies, and let her hand stray across and rest for a moment on her daughter's knee, just as a plump, timid, brown bird settles tentatively upon a twig in full view of the world, and then flutters away again.

“Joy, daughter,” she ventured, “you must try to be cheerful. It must be very hard for

Robert to give this dinner. Don't you reckon you might possibly act just — just as usual?"

The girl withdrew her troubled gaze from the cotton fields, and looked at her mother with a curious blending of petulance and curiosity, as if she realized that this good woman's mental processes would be interesting if they had presented themselves more opportunely.

Mrs. Courteney flushed and took away her hand. "I know," she apologized, "it is just as hard for you as it is for Robert, but—but you must try."

"Why does Robert give this dinner if it is so hard for him?" the girl asked. "Is n't it bad enough for him to lose Heartsease without giving a dinner?"

"Now — er — Joyce," the judge said, fanning his broad, red face with his Panama, "it strikes me that Robert intends the dinner as — er — a palliation."

One of the girl's slippered feet kept tapping on the carriage floor. "Palliation!" she echoed. "Why could n't he have come to us simply and said, 'Heartsease is gone' — without dragging us all to a dinner on the ashes?"

"Why, Joy!" Mrs. Courteney's dismay was almost querulous. "I—I hope you'll not speak like this to Robert or — or to any one. If a stranger were to hear you he would never surmise that you and Robert had been engaged six years."

"And do I care what a stranger would surmise?" the girl asked sharply. She turned and met her aunt's gaze fixed upon her. "Well?" she challenged, as if inviting Miss Mathilde to take a turn at harrying her.

Miss Mathilde was slender and sallow, and haunted by the shadow of lost beauty. Her dark hair, just turning to gray, was drawn back severely, scorning any effort to hide the ravages of time about her sunken temples, and her eyes had a look of unerring insight as if something in their physical clearness helped her intuitions. She smiled and shook her head, but did not withdraw her gaze.

Joyce flushed slowly. "Well?" she demanded a second time.

"I was wondering," Miss Mathilde said, "if I shall ever forgive this Eliot Rand for taking Heartsease away from Robert."

More quickly than the color had risen in the girl's cheeks it paled, leaving only her eyes wonderfully afire. She caught her breath. "And I," she said, "am wondering if I can ever forgive Robert for *losing* Heartsease to Mr. Rand."

She turned toward the broad, white cotton fields, while silence took possession of the carriage, and her father and mother questioned each other uneasily, without words. Mrs. Courteney opened her lips, and closed them again in alarm, but silence and the judge were sworn enemies.

He looked all around him for a subject, and finally out of the carriage window past his daughter. "Robert has — er — an unusually fine yield of cotton this fall," he commented.

Miss Mathilde leaned back against the cushions and closed her eyes. "You forget," she said wearily; "this is not Robert's yield of cotton now; this is Mr. Rand's."

"Why — er — yes, I did forget," the judge acknowledged. He gave a side glance at Joyce, shifted his position, and yielded to the wisdom of saying nothing for the remainder of the drive.

Sunlight and the shadow of vine leaves played over the red brick walls of the house at the summit of the hill, and over the white columns of its gallery. "Heartsease," — the name had come down with the plantation from owner to owner, and, according to the man and to his mood, it had expressed or mocked at his feeling toward the broad fields. The first Robert Linson, embittered, and seeking for comfort in the wilderness, but failing to find it, had christened his disappointment ironically, pleased to think that the word "Heartsease" would at some time turn and taunt each one of his successors. And now, through various Robert Linsons, the place had reached one who had backed a speculation with it and lost, and, if he found its losing as bitter as his ancestor had found its acquisition, he had too much of the old ironist's spirit to complain.

As he stood on the gallery steps, waiting for the carriage, he showed to its occupants as a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow, with restless, laughing eyes, set in a memorable face. Every feature was rugged with daring. To know the world, to play high with it and brazen out his disappointments, to love passionately, yet to stand ready for risking his love or his life as lightly as he had risked the home which had been Heartsease to him in more than name, — such were his longings and his possibilities. A man to win a girl's soul, he had been called, and to hold it through the strangest vicissitudes, and yet, as he helped his guests from their carriage, it was the eyes of the older women which met his with unquestioning fondness, while Joyce, with her face softened from its impatience, greeted him with such gently reserved solicitude that he laughed outright to cover his discomfort.

Judge Courteney did not notice that the laugh was harsh with escaping bitterness. His large, troubled face relaxed. "Robert sets us a good example in gayety," he said, looking pointedly at Joyce. "Such an example is — er — most well timed."

The dinner was a bad hour. Linson had insisted on giving many dinners to the Courteney's during the six years of his engagement to Joyce, and he would not even acknowledge, on her challenge, that they bored him ; they were

part of the bravado with which he courted the full consequence of everything he undertook. Joyce might rebel and ridicule him, threatening to refuse his invitations, but he held to the custom doggedly ; the old judge and Mrs. Courteney and Miss Mathilde loved him for it, although in the third year Miss Mathilde told him, with lurking humor in her dark eyes, that he had already earned his way into the kingdom of heaven and could afford to give one dinner a year instead of one a month for the rest of his life. Miss Mathilde enjoyed the dinners, as she did everything else that was human, in the capacity of acute spectator, — a capacity which does not prevent the heart from being warmed by the very attention to which the mind is giving impartial analysis ; but Judge and Mrs. Courteney took their pleasure without ulterior thoughts. The judge was the chief figure of the occasions, overbearing any general conversation with endless political and agricultural discussions. He monopolized Linson shamelessly, leaving the ladies of the party only such crumbs of attention as their host could fling them over his shoulder while firmly held by the actual buttonhole if necessary. Mrs. Courteney accepted the situation as natural, and talked to her sister in soft, unobtrusive tones about domestic matters ; she wished no greater excitement than a furtive discussion of the methods of aunt Tempy,

Linson's cook, as compared with those of aunt Candicia, her own. Miss Mathilde lent herself with apparent enthusiasm to these interests, but Joyce remained silent and remote, eating her dinner as if it were sawdust, and escaping out of doors from the parlor or the gallery where the others settled themselves for further discussion at its close.

Being able to formulate her convictions as to soups and pastry, and yet have mind for other things, Miss Mathilde often glanced across at Linson and saw his eyes following Joy's white figure down the garden path, with the look in them which marks the great love in a man's life ; but the judge never heeded that look and never relaxed his tenure. And Miss Mathilde's heart misgave her. Quixotic generosity is not the surest means of keeping a girl's fancy, and she questioned if all Linson's daring and headlong charm, if his unfailing devotion during twenty-nine days of every month, could atone for this recurrent sacrifice of the monthly dinner. If there had been other people to vary its monotony there would have been less danger in it, but Heartsease and Oak Hall, the Courteney place, were the only congenially occupied plantations within convenient reach of each other, so there was seldom a new face at the table. This had been going on for six years. Linson and Joyce had been engaged since Joyce was fourteen, and Judge Courteney

had decreed that they should not marry until she was twenty-one.

"A woman rarely knows her own mind before that age," he announced steadfastly, and so the uneventful time passed, marked by its dinners, and all the seven years of probation had gone by but one, when Linson, speculating wildly out of restlessness and to afford new luxuries for Joyce after their marriage, lost Heartsease. He talked lightly of regaining it within the year, but nobody expected him to do so, and, as he was too proud to marry until he had regained it or its equivalent, the time of waiting appeared to stretch indefinitely forward.

On this last day, before Linson gave up the plantation and went North to try his fortune, every one, even Mrs. Courteney, thought that the judge would relinquish him to the company at dinner and to Joyce afterwards. Probably the judge himself looked forward to some such course, but a question of finance happened to come up, and if there was one thing on which Linson needed to have sound ideas to take away with him, it was finance. The judge's views proved not only sound but broad, at least in the amount of time which they covered. The party entered the dining-room and came out onto the gallery again before he had half expressed himself, and the golden peace of approaching sunset found him barely beginning to recapitulate.

Joyce had wandered into the garden long before ; her face was still inscrutable in the gentleness which had come to it when she met Linson, and her head drooped a little, as if she were a flower on which the sun had shone too long. For a while she walked between the flower-beds, where nearly everything looked a trifle weary of the sunshine, but finally she passed round the house and out of view.

Some time afterward, Miss Mathilde caught the gleam of a white dress entering a bit of distant woodland which stood untouched between the cultivated fields. For a half hour she waited to catch sight of it again ; then she crossed the gallery and interrupted the judge's discourse.

"Robert," she said, "it will soon be time for us to start home, and Joy has roamed clear off into your woods. Unless you bring her back, she'll delay us."

Linson jumped to his feet. "If you'll excuse me," he began, and was off down the gallery steps before the older man could put out a ponderous hand to detain him.

"Why — er — really !" the judge exclaimed. He looked at his sister-in-law with slowly gathering offense and surprise. "Er — really, Mathilde, you seem to forget that this is Robert's last day with us. You might have sent a servant for Joy."

II

In spite of omens and premonitions, a man's real disaster usually falls out of a clear sky. It comes swiftly, wasting no time in explanations, sent thus, perhaps, to give the rest of his life the comfortless, unfailing interest of thinking out its cause. If he tells you of it while his hurt is sharpest he will use few words.

Linson's disaster was not the loss of Hearts-ease. It was something that happened in the bit of woods where he went for Joyce, and to the end of his life he knew no more of its causes than he would have known if it had been a dream. For months, unknown to him, events had been preparing for it. He was ignorant of them; it happened, and in the wreck of his love he asked no questions. Night found him, as he had planned, on his way to try new fortunes in the North.

Pine needles are soft under the feet, but it was more a foolish, lover-like impulse to come upon Joyce unaware that made his steps so light as he hurried between the trees. He might have called to her; instead, he peered to right and left for the glint of her white dress. The level sunlight passed between the tree trunks with him, searching for her; it touched her first and gleamed back, giving him a strange thrill and elation. He almost called out, but checked himself and drew back.

She was not alone. Eliot Rand, the new owner of Heartsease, stood beside her, looking down into her face.

Linson found himself trembling so that the stiff leaves of the gaulberry bushes around him rattled, but neither of them heard him.

Joyce was almost as white as her dress. "Don't!" she said. "If it were not for Heartsease — if you had not taken his place away. Ah, can't you see that you are cruel to me as well as to him?"

"The place has nothing to do with us," Rand declared. "It did not come to me from him, but from others to whom he had lost it. I had nothing to do with his losses — you understand that?"

"I understand nothing except my promise to him!" she cried hopelessly. "God knows what I should do if he were not in trouble, but now when he has lost everything — to do him such a wrong" — She raised her hand slowly to her heart and pressed it there, taking a deep breath. "He has loved me for six years — since we were children," she went on. "I must keep my promise. I — I must forget."

As if to beg his help or to bid him farewell, she put out her hand to him, but he disregarded it. "*Can* you forget?" he asked. "Or is the wrong already done?"

For a moment her eyes met his in a desperate endeavor as if she were trying to blind them

to his face. He drew her close to him and kissed her.

It was then that Linson came forward. He had squared his shoulders, his eyes were sparkling, and there was a futile effect of gayety in his voice. "It is scarcely necessary to wish you joy," he said, "but I can bid you good-by."

III

Rand was the opposite of Linson in almost every way, and, at first glance, that was the only explanation of Joyce's preference for him, — or at least so her people thought, — realizing that even change for the worse may fascinate. Yet Rand was not inferior to Linson, and was far from the typical usurper. Gentle, reserved, and in the main almost overscrupulous, he lacked vivacity and outward fire, but gradually gave an impression of a strong nature well controlled. Indeed, he seemed so considerate, and at the same time so cool, that it was hard to give credit to the underlying forces of his nature, or to understand that in his quieter way he was as bent as Linson upon following events to their full consequence. More slender in figure, fairer, and less noticeable in face than his predecessor, he had deep-set blue eyes which showed a steadiness and a gleam of assertion, proclaiming him very much a man. Where Linson threw back his head and laughed in the world's face, Rand seemed

unaware that a world was in sight. Those who once took account of him grew more and more certain that he would never be a pawn in any game where he figured, but any one with a good eye for the future might have seen that he was entering a game in which he could scarcely be looked on as the player.

Joyce was married to him on her twenty-first birthday. She would have delayed her wedding or hastened it, to avoid a date which had been tacitly set seven years before, but her father had had it fixed in his mind too long to think of changing it without graver cause. Here was Joyce, and here was a man eager to marry her, and here was the appointed hour; he held, too, that it was just as unwise for a girl to enter matrimony after twenty-one as before, and perhaps he was influenced by the fact that the year of the new engagement had been a dull one. Joyce had been moody, Rand was always quiet, and the Courtenays had not been invited to Heartsease. Considering how frankly Joyce had condemned the family dinners, there would have been small cause for wonder if she had never given one, yet she insisted on reinstating the old custom after her marriage.

"Child," Miss Mathilde said when the first invitation was given, "you don't want us."

"Yes," Joyce declared, "I do want you."

And Mrs. Courteney added with a touch of

her husband's manner, "It would be very unnatural, sister, if she did not wish to entertain her own family."

Miss Mathilde gave one of those cruelly clear looks of which she had been prodigal since the broken engagement. "Have you ordered your sackcloth gown?" she asked.

Joyce was learning to meet her aunt's eyes without a change of color. "It is not necessary," she said. "Papa will be there."

"Papa will be there!" Mrs. Courteney echoed. "Why, daughter, papa would be the last to decline."

It was true that the judge had made no secret of a desire for all the old manifestations of good feeling. After expressing much surprise and displeasure, he had accepted Rand as an alternate for Linson, and was beginning to grow fond of him, discovering that Rand, too, had a listening ear.

"Let there be no—er—stiffness," he admonished his wife and his sister-in-law as they drove up the hill to the first dinner of the new series. "Robert—I mean—er—Eliot is going to find this a very trying day."

"I'm afraid he will," Miss Mathilde assented. She had not forgiven Rand.

When they reached the top of the hill, although Joyce was on the gallery waiting for them, as she had not been of old, it seemed oddly natural to be alighting there from the

carriage, and to catch a whiff of aunt Tempy's soup, borne by a stray breeze through the long hall.

The judge went beaming up the steps to kiss his daughter. "This seems like the good old times," he declared genially, and, in unconscious proof of it, he called his son-in-law "Robert" almost continuously during the meal. It was useless for Miss Mathilde to dart him warning glances, or for his wife to touch him timidly under the table. If he became aware of a mistake, his effort at amends only served to lift and flaunt it. Out of sheer helplessness the older women fell back into their old way of absenting themselves by discussing household matters in an undertone. Rand captured the judge's attention and kept him from making the conversation general as he was attempting for the first time in his life, and Joyce sat out the meal isolated, her thin dark face showing none of the old-time impatience, but held in lines as unyielding as those of a mask.

When it was over and the Courteney's had gone, Rand came to her as she stood at the edge of the gallery looking across the great broken valley in which the wealth of Heartsease lay outspread. Declining sunlight filled it to the brim with gold, through which shimmered field after field of cotton. It was autumn; all the memorable days of Heartsease fell at that time of the year.

"Joy," he said, "we must not try this again."

"Why?" she demanded, flashing the question into his eyes with a sudden light through the unrelaxed lines of her face.

"It's too hard for you and no pleasure to them."

"They'll soon be used to it. Papa enjoyed himself to-day, mamma will enjoy it next time, and aunt Mathilde, — I think aunt Mathilde likes to see me in pain."

"But why bear a needless pain? They may grow used to it, but will you? I'm afraid you are too sensitive; I'm afraid you will always need shielding" —

"Shielding!" she broke in; she looked at him with her old supercilious curiosity as she might have looked at her mother. "I wonder," she questioned, "if you think it makes a great difference to have papa here saying things when all the time we are living in Robert's house, looking at Robert's land?" She paused and controlled the impatience of her voice. "You were a stranger before the property came to you," she went on. "You can scarcely realize how everything I see speaks to me."

"Shall I sell the place?" he asked. "Shall we go away?"

She shook her head. "Not until you can sell my memory. After all, perhaps it's not

the place. Aunt Mathilde asked me if I had bought my sackcloth gown. I told her there was no need. She knows I'm wearing it."

Rand was silent a while.

"You regret our marriage?" he asked finally.

"Yes," she cried out sharply, "yes, I do!"

After all Rand did not know her very well. He did not understand that she was still a spoiled child storming at the punishment which life held over her, as she had once stormed at her mother's threats, and with a vague feeling that life, like her mother, would remit the chastisement. Linson might have understood, perhaps; at least he would have hidden his pain. Rand was too much appalled.

"Is it," he asked with difficulty, — "have you found that you care more for Linson?"

She gave him another glance of cold, far-removed interest, and said nothing. He made an abrupt motion as if excusing her from answer, and turned away.

Through the silence, from some distant plantation, came the peaceful ringing of a bell. The bell of Heartsease clanged out near at hand, full-toned and sweet, but too insistent. The negroes came trooping from the fields, happy at leaving their work and unconcerned by yesterday or to-morrow. For them, each day had its account apart, or its lack of account; each night gave them absolution.

Joyce started to follow her husband. "Eliot," she began, "if I could only feel forgiven, — if I could only stop remembering" —

Rand did not turn back. Her outspoken regret had raised a barrier between them which it would be hard to cross. Joyce followed him as far as the gallery steps, then suddenly she sat down and buried her face in her hands. It had occurred to her that she had no right to cross it, no right to a stolen happiness. The idea of penance was new, and she caught it to her heart in a passion. The old, old road of forfeiture opened before her as a new way by which she could escape from pain.

IV

For the fourteenth time since Robert Linson bade them good-by the fields of Heartsease glimmered white. It was exactly thirteen years since Rand had married Joyce, and, as usual on all epoch-marking days at the plantation, the Courteney's were coming to dinner.

Joyce stood on the gallery waiting for them. The sunlight shone full into her face, showing deep lines of brooding and morbid resolution. It had been said of her that she looked as if she saw sorrow over her shoulder all the while. Rand stood by, realizing the change in her the more clearly because of the day. He had changed also. Though his expression had still

greater reserve and strength, his features fell easily into lines of harshness ; but as he looked at his wife they were full of yearning. The years of their marriage passed before him, years of widening estrangement in which Linson had seemed to walk between them, holding their happiness and giving them, in exchange for it, only memories. For his part Rand could not tell whether his wife loved Linson or loved him, or had lost her love of both in morbidness. At times he was full of pity for her, at times bitter, at times jealous, and now that so many years had passed without changing her, he reproached himself for not having sold Heartsease in the beginning and taken her away.

"Joyce," he said at last.

"I caught a glimpse of the carriage," she answered, without looking at him.

He went nearer to her and put his hand on hers. "Joyce," he said again.

Her glance ranged across the white fields which billowed in every direction from the house. The plantation was all in cultivation now ; there was not a foot of woodland left on it. "I have heard that the first owner of this place named it in bitterness," she murmured. The words seemed irrelevant, but she gave him a glance as if warning him, and a smile such as the first Robert Linson must have foreseen stirred her lips.

Rand's thought was too single for irony. "Are we to go on so till we die?" he asked.

She only answered by a slight motion such as one uses in staying an impatient child. "Yes, there is the carriage," she announced. "Papa will have ransacked the garden to bring me roses, — a great bunch of red roses with his regrets that they're not white."

"Wait," he begged almost under his breath. "You were standing down yonder, and I rode up beside you and jumped down from my horse" —

"Let us forget it," she broke in.

"Wait," he repeated. His hand clasped hers in petition. She could not refuse to turn toward him.

Tears rose in her eyes and she tried to withdraw. For a long moment they gazed at each other, then he released her hand and turned away.

"Can't you feel that it is wrong?" she said at last. "We have no right to love each other."

"We are man and wife."

"We have no right to be."

"If we have no right," he began slowly, "there is but one reason" — He paused, choking back what he had meant to say. "Is the past never to end?" he asked in another tone. "Is n't there such a thing as forgiveness, as beginning over, as making the best of a mistake?"

"I—I have been trying to do that," she said.

He sighed, looking out over the shimmering fields. She had been engaged to Linson for six years, but now for thirteen years she had been Rand's wife. He wondered if his own sense of proportion was as strange as hers. Had she felt but one duty in the world? To him the past seemed something upon which to build the present, a foundation defective and unchangeable, yet never too poor to support a better structure than remorse. Was it remorse, or was it love for Linson that estranged them? The carriage came in sight again, winding between the snowy knolls, and he wondered what new tale of his predecessor it was bringing up the hill. Usually the tale was a recollection; once in a long while it was a rumor. Linson had prospered, rumor declared once, and Rand had been obliged to listen while the judge reiterated, "Robert—er—deserves it. I have always looked upon Robert as—as a son." Linson had married,—such tidings should have given peace to Joyce if her trouble were remorse. Mrs. Courteney had gazed at her daughter wistfully while wondering if Robert's wife were dark or fair. And, also, Linson had a son who was named for him. Rand had no child. It scarcely seemed that Linson had been dealt with unfairly, after all. Rand's eyes narrowed. He could see Linson,

somewhere in the shadowy environment of his unknown home, smiling into his wife's eyes and meeting an answering smile, — perhaps tossing up his boy. "Poor Robert," they all said in speaking of him, — poor Robert with the gay laugh and the fond wife and the boy to hand down his name. "Poor Robert — er — Eliot," fate may have said.

"They are bringing some one with them!" Joyce exclaimed. "I see a child looking out of the carriage window. Who can it be?"

"I'm sure I can't tell." He straightened himself. The coming of the Courteney's was like the falling of the drop of water in the old torment, a small thing, but so sure never to miss; and they were almost up the hill. Their having a child with them mattered very little to Rand.

"I don't understand it," Joyce said nervously. "Where can they have found a child?"

The carriage stopped and Joyce and Rand went to meet it. The judge stepped out and helped his wife. Miss Mathilde followed leading a travel-stained little boy who looked about him and gripped a dog-eared letter in his hand. He resembled no one whom Joyce or Rand had ever seen.

The Courteney's had changed little, but their manner was unusual. Miss Mathilde had been weeping, and Mrs. Courteney's eyes were still wet.

"Joyce — daughter," she fluttered, coming ahead of the others and stretching out her plump, timid hands.

"What is it?" Joyce asked. Her breath was short, though there seemed little material in her life for ill news.

The older woman's lips began to quiver, and she turned back toward her husband.

"Let me — er — break it," the judge offered. "Er — Joyce, daughter, Robert Linson has passed away."

Joyce turned sharply and went up the steps. The others stood looking after her.

"And this child?" Rand inquired.

"This is — er — little Robert. We found him at the station as we passed. The agent called us in. It seems — er — that Robert directed him to be sent here with a letter to you."

The boy came forward, wide-eyed, but pathetically prompt, as if this were an interview long arranged.

Rand took the letter from him and opened it.

SIR [the simplicity of the address was like a challenge. He drew back a little from the curious group and read], — In your enjoyment of my home and of the love of the woman who had promised to be my wife, perhaps you will have charity to extend to a dying man. I am

leaving a little boy whose mother is already dead, and as the end comes near, my heart turns back with torturing desire toward my old home. I have not been a happy man. You took my happiness, but I have been too busy to think all the while. Now, in this terrible leisure while I wait to die, I do nothing but think. I see the old house with its white columns and the bricks, sunny warm, and the open hall door, and the vista of light through the shadow of the hall. "Heartsease!" what a perfect name for it. I see the sunshine brooding over the cotton fields, and the boles opening, oh, so much whiter than this Northern snow which has killed me. And, Rand, I see her, — God! man, I've never stopped seeing her, though she is not the mother of my boy. They are all I have, these memories. I should have died sooner than this without them; I fight death still for fear I shall forget, and my heart almost bursts with pity when I think of my poor little boy who knows nothing of it all. Why should I have brought him into the world if he cannot have what is best in it? And for him to be left — here away from home — Rand, take this letter to her and take the boy to her. Let her look at him and read the letter. Then look in each other's eyes, you two in your great happiness, and you will not refuse to let my son grow up under your care in the home I loved.

Yours with a trust which outweighs all I
have suffered through you,

ROBERT LINSON.

The sheets of the letter rattled together as Rand folded it. He opened it again and looked at the date. It had been written nine months before. He refolded it in silence, although he felt the eyes of the others upon him, waiting for an explanation. He had scarcely been conscious of reading, the words seemed to enter his consciousness in Robert Linson's voice. They had been written with a dying man's license of free speech, and yet he found it impossible to realize that the hand which had written them, the voice which might have spoken them, were no longer alive. He reached down to the little boy.

"Come," he said.

"Er — Eliot," the judge began, but Miss Mathilde laid her hand on his shoulder. In her clear eyes lurked the shadow of more than one lost joy. "Stop," she said. "We will stay outside. This is for them, alone."

In the house, in her own room, Joyce sat by an open window with locked hands. Rand brought the boy in to her. "Look at him," he said simply, "and read the letter."

Joyce drew the child toward her and looked at him a long time. The little fellow flushed under her gaze and stood by her, expectant,

docile, grave. He was one of those wan children who seem to hide the subtlest wisdom behind their innocence, yet are not eager to show it to the world. "There is nothing in his face to remember," she said at last.

Then she opened the letter. Rand crossed the room while she read it, but the little boy stood close beside her, like a conscious suppliant, watching her with his wide blue eyes. Suddenly a tear splashed on the paper.

She rose and went across to Rand.

"Is this forgiveness?" she asked.

He looked at her white face, marveling at the tenacity of her thought. "If trust is forgiveness" — he began.

But she had outstripped him. "Robert would not have sent him if he had thought we were unhappy," she broke in. "A child could not be happy in — in a cheerless home. He says, 'in your great happiness.'" She turned and held out her arms to the boy; but when he came to her and she lifted him, she looked into her husband's face. Her eyes held their old love for him.

"'You two, in your great happiness,'" she repeated tremulously. For a moment their hearts spoke together, pledging the unappalled endeavor which life asks.

Then Rand took the wondering boy out of her arms.

THE SHUTTLES OF THE WEB

THE Florida orange season was done, and the army of drummers for fruit-commission houses had dispersed and was drifting towards Chicago and New York. Some of the men stopped at way-stations in the Middle South to look over the ground to which they would be returning in strawberry, tomato, or peach time, and others were content to swing themselves off at each stopping-place, shake hands with every one in reach, and then scurry back into the train, to their novels, their cards, and their cigars.

Frazeo did not take as much trouble as that. He represented a "solid" old firm whose clients were not in special need of having their hands shaken, and also, although he knew the region well, it was just outside of his programme for the coming year, as it had been for some years before. It looked as if it were out of God's programme, too, and had been abandoned as a sort of devil's practice-ground for making pits and gullies. Frazeo propped himself up and stretched himself out, pulled his cap over his eyes, and went to sleep.

"Hello," a voice said.

He pushed back his cap and stared hazily into the face of Tarleton, another young traveling man, who shoved him over towards the window and sat down beside him. Frazee held out a hand. "Just come aboard?" he asked. "How far up are we, anyhow?"

"Magnolia," said Tarleton. "I've been making bean contracts. You're just from Florida?"

Frazee nodded. "Been in oranges, and stayed on to do something in early tomatoes and strawberries, till that frost cut everything. What's new in Magnolia? How's Miss Lee — still running the Magnolia House, and Randall Carter, and that partner of his, Honey Poindexter, with a high hand?"

Tarleton bored an imaginary hole in the floor with the umbrella which he was twirling between his knees. "Miss Lee's changed," he said. "She's seen hard times. Have you been there since she married Randall Carter?"

"I should remark," answered Frazee. "They'd been married a year, and it appeared to be an old story to both of them, the last summer I was there."

"Well, it got older," Tarleton said, "and I tell you, I don't think she was to blame at all. Did you ever see a woman more on the square than she was, Frazee?"

"Never," said Frazee, with emphasis. "What happened?"

"It's queer you have n't heard about it," Tarleton said. "Why, she got desperate and started to leave Randall and run off with Pomfret — you remember Pomfret, for Hagan and Company? Poor little old Honey stopped her, and then Randall came on the scene and began talking up to her, and Honey gripped him by the throat. Randall was armed and Honey was n't, so Randall shot him and skipped. It was self-defense plain enough, but he never came back to take his chances. Honey died; nobody had ever dreamed he had that much fight in him."

"And Miss Lee?" asked the other.

"Oh, she's just been staying on to run the Magnolia House," Tarleton answered. "There was n't anything else for her to do."

Both men were silent for a while, and the red-clay gullies swept past them. "Well, that's pretty sad," Frazee said at last. "Any thing else happened in Magnolia?"

Tarleton shook his head. The story he had told was more vivid to him than to Frazee, and his mind was still upon it. "I suppose there was more to Honey Poindexter than any of us gave him credit for," he said. "He certainly loved Miss Lee as faithfully as a dog, and as harmlessly. The tongue-lashings he used to take from her would have shut another man up or have sent him to the devil, but there did n't seem to be any leverage she could

get on Honey, and, drunk or sober, he was just the same easy-going chap, and just as fond of her. I never saw him ruffled up but once — until that time with Randall.”

“What ruffled him?” asked Frazee, drumming lightly on the window.

“It was nothing much,” said Tarleton, “but it set me to noticing him a little more. Randall was off on one of his sprees — absent three months — and Miss Lee had got to looking so white we were all of us worked up about her. She could scold Randall sharp enough when he was there, but it was easy to see she had n’t stopped caring for him; and, when she did n’t know anybody was looking, her lips would get to quivering like a child’s. I don’t suppose I was different from a half-dozen men in the house that all had her on their minds and were on the lookout to cheer her up if they could.

“Pomfret was there, and I suppose that was when he first got his interest in her. She was so pretty and so pitiful-looking in spite of the grit she showed — it used to hurt me sometimes to hear her let out and scold at Honey, for she seemed too fine-grained for that sort of thing; but then scolding’s the only outlet a woman’s got, and Honey hung round her, trying to make up for her husband’s delinquencies, until he nearly drove her wild. He’d boarded so long with her that he felt as if he belonged to her, anyway, and he would n’t even go down

the street to the post-office without hunting all over the house to tell her, 'I'm going down town, Miss Lee.' We boys all took it up, and it was one of the best things we could work to make her laugh. About evening mail-time, when we had all come in from the country and had had our suppers, and she'd be sitting out on the gallery getting her first rest for the day, we'd go stringing past her in a procession, saying, 'I'm going down town, Miss Lee,' until she'd jump up and fairly shoo the last of us off toward the post-office, and sometimes she'd begin to laugh again when she saw us coming back. I reckon Honey got a little huffy about it, but he didn't let on until the day I took her for a drive. I did more for her than most of the boys. Pomfret was n't in it that year."

Frazees had stopped drumming on the window and was watching his companion's face. Tarleton had never talked to him so much on any subject before, and it seemed to him that the young man had more than an observer's interest in Miss Lee; but Tarleton looked up and read the thought and answered it. "No I never was touched, myself," he said; "only, if she had never been married to that brute, and if I'd never heard her scold, I don't know how it might have been. Anyway, Honey must have got the notion that I liked her, for when we came back from that drive, and I called

Pete—you remember big, black Pete?—to take my horse to the stable, Honey spoke up good and loud, so that everybody on the gallery heard, and said, 'Pete, I'll give you a dollar not to do it.' I tell you there was stillness for a minute, and Pete stood there with his eyes rolling from one of us to the other, and then Miss Lee said, 'Pete, you take that horse,' and Pete took it. Poor Honey, he got the law laid down to him that time until I was actually sorry for him, and I made up my mind that if it hurt the poor fellow like that to see the rest of us hanging round her and mocking him, I was going to stop; for it was n't doing her much good—soon as she was left alone, and sometimes even while we were talking to her, that quiver would come into her lips. I don't believe a man of us ever saw it without wanting to pick her up in his arms and comfort her, but all of us except Pomfret had our ideas of how far it would do to go." The long dismal whistle of the train stopped him, and he jumped to his feet. "Here we are at Jefferson. I have to speak to a man at the station. Coming out?"

"No," said Frazee; but as the train slowed up he lifted his window and leaned from it, calling greetings to half the people in sight. Tarleton had time to shake hands with the whole visible population, and to buttonhole one old farmer for a private interview, before

the conductor gave the signal to start. He came on board smiling, but, after he and Frazee had exchanged comments on the people they had seen, he grew thoughtful again.

"I never knew how or when she and Pomfret came to an understanding," he said, breaking silence with his story as if it had not been interrupted. "None of the rest of us caught on to there being anything unusual between them until about a year ago. Randall did n't go off on any spree last summer. He took his spree out at home; abusing his wife." The young man's face hardened. "I don't believe you ever saw anything like it, Frazee. He was mild when you were there. It was n't only that he took the tone of a brute and a bully towards her. He used to do devilish things to hurt her, and I've seen her, when she was working, roll down her sleeves right quick, if she saw anybody coming, to hide the black and blue. We boys took him aside one night and explained to him what we would do if he did n't change his tactics — and he was a little more decent after that — but there was n't one of us except Pomfret that had the courage to show her that he saw what was going on and was sorry for her — we were all so afraid of hurting her more. But Pomfret was different. He simply told her that he loved her, and could n't stand the sight of what she suffered, and was going to carry her off with him out of

harm's way. Of course, I did n't know about it at the time, and scarcely had a suspicion of it, she treated us all so much alike. But women are queer. She could n't consent at first, and yet it did n't hurt her pride as much to be talked to like that as to see all the rest of us pretending to notice nothing and looking the other way.

"Pomfret kept on urging and she kept on refusing, but feeling more and more all the while that there was n't any law of God or man to hold her, and poor Honey Poindexter never gave them a moment's peace. I suppose he began to feel what was going on, for he followed her about closer than ever, and no matter where they went to talk together, Honey would come after her to beg her to do something for him, or to ask her some fool child's question, or may be only to tell her he was going down town, until she got so out of patience with him that she wanted to run away 'most as much to get rid of him as to escape from Randall. Well, finally the time came quick and sudden, as it will with a woman, when she could n't stand any more and made up her mind to go. You'd think she'd have been planning for a divorce, but that was n't her way. She'd got it in her head that she'd promised Randall 'till death do us part,' and she believed she'd be breaking through that just as much with a divorce as without; and then I reckon when

she gave up and loved Pomfret she threw most every other thought to the winds. Pomfret had come up here to Jefferson on the morning train, as he often did, and they had it planned that she was to take the night train, and he was to get on board and join her with their two tickets for the North." Tarleton paused a moment. "Frazee," he said abruptly, "did you ever let yourself start in to overhear something, taking it for nonsense and thinking it would put you ahead of the crowd with a joke, and then find yourself listening to what you'd have given more than you were worth not to hear?"

The older man turned from the car window and let his shrewd, not unsympathetic eyes rest on Tarleton. "What kind of a deal did you let yourself into?" he asked.

"Oh, just hearing the whole thing laid off beforehand," Tarleton answered nonchalantly. "I'm subject to headaches, and one morning a bad one came on after I had started out in the country; so I gave up my day's work and drove back to the house. There was nobody round the front, and the parlor looked so cool and dark and quiet, the way Miss Lee tried to keep it by daytime, that I walked in there and lay down rather than go up to my room—you remember how hot those chambers were. I shut the door so as not to hear the coming and going through the halls, but pretty soon

the door opened kind of softly, and Honey came in and shut it again. It seemed like a funny thing for him to do, and a minute after I pretty near laughed right out, for, bless you, he began to cry — just to blubber in regular big gulps like a kid. I supposed he had a jag on and may be Miss Lee had been scoring him, so I lay quiet and said nothing. Pretty soon he kind of swallowed down his feelings and went to the door and called for Miss Lee to come there. You remember how he used to call for her — the way a young one comes to the door of a house and shouts for his mother without ever taking a step to look her up?"

Frazee nodded. "I never thought he loved her except just the way a boy does his mother," he said, "partly out of helplessness, and because she was Randall's wife. He was used to being Randall's shadow in everything."

"Wait till I tell you," said Tarleton. "Like a fool I kept lying low back there in the dark, for I thought their talk would be a part of the regular circus between them that we all counted as belonging to the Magnolia House bill of fare. Well, after he'd yelled a while, I heard her heels click, clicking through the hall, and she called out to him unusually sharp, 'Well?'

"I could see both their faces against the white door. She was flushed, and had her lips shut tight and her eyes brighter than I

ever saw them, and he stood there shaking like a leaf and white as death. I saw then he was n't drunk. He kept trying to say something, and the words would n't come, and she stood and stared at him as if she wanted to face him down. After a minute he just dropped on the floor and caught hold of her dress and sobbed out, 'Don't go, Miss Lee.'

"On my soul, if a look could have singed him, like frost, Honey would have withered right then. She drew herself up and pulled herself out of his reach and said, 'Go where?'

"Honey did n't seem to notice. He got hold of her and pulled her inside the door, and shut it so nobody could see or hear, and then he told her how he 'd heard some of the things that she and Pomfret said, but that he had n't thought much about 'em except to hate Pomfret, until that morning he wanted her to sew a button on for him and he went moseying into her room looking for her, and found her little traveling-bag out and things spread around to pack in it. She 'd begun because Randall was gone, and then the cook had called her, and she 'd had to leave. I did n't know how such a fool as Honey ever had the sense to put two and two together.

"All the time I was lying back there and taking the thing in — seemed as if Honey's words fell on me like so many stones, until they pretty near stopped my breath. I had

never thought it could come to that with her, and I felt as if I could n't wait long enough to give her time to speak up and deny it. But she let Honey get good and through, and there was a long while that I could hear the two of them breathing — may be they could have heard me, too, if they'd listened — and then Honey he burst out again begging and pleading, and not pleading for himself or Randall, but for her, until she began to sob and threw herself on his mercy. She told him of what living with Randall had been to her, and how she'd felt herself falling lower and lower and losing every hold she had until she hardly knew whether she was herself or some out-cast woman crept into her shape, and she begged him if he loved her, as she believed he did, true and faithful, not to put a straw in her path, more'n he would in the path of a soul climbing up out of hell.

"I tell you, Frazee, I thought I'd known before what there was in women — love and a sort of faithfulness, and spite and temper, and I'd seen the very devil sometimes in her eyes, but I never guessed at the years of damnation that they'll go through with, bound hand and foot, before they're ready to break away from what's been laid down for them to bear. Of course, after I was cool again, I saw it differently — saw it the way it is — but just while I was listening to her, I'd have liked to

help her break through everything that had been holding her, and I'd have given half my life to have been in Pomfret's place, so I could feel I was a man helping a woman to get free. Poor Honey, once in a while when she'd stop a minute for breath, I could hear him sort of gasp, and when she finished he choked out that he wanted her to go, and he would n't tell a soul, only he begged her to come into his room just before she started and bid him good-by. She laughed and told him he'd be asleep, but he said no, he would n't, and so she promised — just the way a woman promises a child something so she can get away from it."

"You mean she did n't keep her word?" Frazee asked, for Tarleton had stopped and was staring blankly ahead of him, as if he meant to finish the story to himself, without words. At the question he looked around at Frazee and smiled.

"What do you take her for?" he asked. "Do you think she wanted to trust Honey's discretion along in the middle of the night when the house was dead still? No, sir, and anyhow she hoped he'd go to sleep, but he did n't, and neither did I. Randall was snoring away peacefully enough, and he did n't hear her when she got up and began stirring around so soft that sometimes I thought I heard her, and sometimes I thought it was just night sounds. Finally, her door opened

with a little creak that there wasn't any mistaking, and she was stealing step by step down the stairs, when there came a sort of cry from Honey's room, and he jumped and ran after her to make her tell him good-by. Randall roused up at that, and came stumbling out, cocking his revolver, and saw her standing at the foot of the stairs by the night-lamp, holding her bag in one hand and motioning Honey back with the other. He let out a big oath and wanted to know where she was going, and she answered rather slow and clear :

" 'I'm going where you'll never see me again.'

"I reckon pretty near the straight of the whole thing came to him with that, for he began cursing her and calling her vile names, until I heard Honey make a spring at him. I jumped out of bed and began to dress, but before I could get into the hall Randall's revolver went off, and I heard him tearing down the stairs ; when I got out, Miss Lee was bending over Honey, holding her dress one side out of the blood. I shan't forget her face. She wasn't sorry for him ; she was angry.

"The shot roused the whole house, of course, and the boys came pouring out of their rooms, ready for action, but they could n't get any track of Randall in the night, and anyway, Miss Lee said Honey had sprung on him so

sudden that he was taken at a disadvantage, and would have been killed if he had n't shot ; so there was n't much to do but pick Honey up and get a doctor. Miss Lee went about seeing to everything as quiet as if she was ordering a dinner, and when everybody asked her how it had happened, she told 'em so plain and straight and simple that it made 'em draw back. The only time she gave any sort of a start was when the train whistled ; that took her by surprise, and she caught in a big husky breath that sounded worse than a scream. The saddest part of it was that Honey did n't lose consciousness, and he could see how hard her face was while she was working over him. If I could have looked forward to anything like his being shot, I'd have expected her to be crying over him, and reproaching herself ; but not a bit of it. She was thinking if he had kept out of her path he wouldn't have been hurt, and it made her all the colder and harder to see his eyes following her everywhere, begging her to forgive him.

"It was two weeks before he died, and I never saw such a pitiful time. Pomfret came the first morning, for, when he boarded the train at Jefferson and did not find her, he only went on as far as Lodi and took the down train back to Magnolia to see what had happened. She saw him, and they must have talked an hour together, and then he walked

out of the house, and out of her life, too, he counted it. He'd telegraphed the day before to give up his job, and I reckon if the world ever looked black to a man it did to him. Their interview did n't leave Miss Lee feeling any gentler toward Honey, and poor Honey wanted her by him every minute. He was just like a kid that can't get it through his head that begging for a thing won't bring it soon or late. It was n't enough for her to do everything for him ; he wanted her to stay right by him and hold his hand, and let him look at her like a dog that's pleading for something it don't have the words to ask for. I reckon those eyes of his pretty near drove her crazy before the end. She did everything in the world for him except stay with him, and I saw her sometimes as soon as she got out of the door pretty near run to get away from the sound of his voice following her, it was so thin and sick. There was n't anybody mocking him then for calling her all the time.

"Between his suffering and hers and the care of the house and the nursing and the constant running up and down stairs, I never saw anybody change as she did in those two weeks ; Honey noticed it, too, and the very day he died he told me she looked sick. I didn't know he was so near gone, and I thought it was a good chance to make him understand he ought n't to call on her so

much. He could hardly take that in, he was so in the habit of depending on her; but he lay and studied on it a while, and then he looked at me kind of pleased, as if he'd hit on a cure-all, and said he was going to be moved downstairs so she would n't have to climb the steps. Just to please him, I said that would be a great help to her. I had no idea he'd have the spunk to put it through by himself,—and, of course, she would n't have allowed it,—but the next time I came in the house I found he'd just made Pete and another darky carry him down on his mattress and lay him in that little room Randall used to call his office, right by the front door. He caught sight of me and asked me to come in and see how surprised she'd be when she found him there. His face was all white and sunken, but his eyes shone out of it like a child's, he was so sure he'd done something to please her at last.

“He made Pete promise to go and tell her that somebody wanted to see her in the office and not to say who it was, and then he waited with his eyes just shining on the door, though he looked like death. I dreaded to hear her coming, I was so afraid she'd be sharp with him, but he had n't a doubt she'd be happy to see him there, and as soon as her shadow came over the threshold he called out, 'It's jus' me!'

"Well, she stood there staring at him until he saw that she was n't pleased, and then the light went out of his eyes, and I think he realized that may be she could n't forgive him, and he might have to die alone. But it seemed as if he did n't know how to give up, and after a minute he looked at her again and said: 'I reckoned you was getting played out from climbing the stairs, Miss Lee, so I jus' come down.'

"She could n't help smiling a little at that, it sounded so offhand from a dying man, but her lips began to quiver in that pitiful way, and she told him he was mighty kind. He brightened right up, and asked her if she really thought so, and she said yes, and then they could n't think of anything more to talk about. He looked at her face, and then all round the room, as if he was hunting for something more to please her, and she was looking right steady at him with the tears coming up in her eyes. I started to go, but she motioned me not to; she did n't want even then to be alone with him, and so I stayed, for I knew Honey did n't care. After a while he looked up at her again with that old pleading look, and she knelt down by him, sobbing, and took his two hands in hers, but could n't say a word.

"I did n't care then whether she wanted me to stay or not. I could n't look at his face nor at hers, for all that she 'd done and been

about to do seemed to have come over her. So I slipped out, and went into the parlor, where I'd been that other time, and lay down and thought. Things had been going along for those two weeks just hanging on the thread of Honey's life, and I could n't figure out what would come when he was gone."

"You seem to have taken the whole thing on your shoulders," Frazee said casually.

"Somebody had to," Tarleton answered — "or, no, nobody had to, for there was n't anything to be done. Only I could n't get away from that look on Miss Lee's face, and it did n't seem as if she 'd done enough wrong to have her life left in such shape as that — Honey's death at her door, the whole thing known about her and Pomfret, and Randall hiding out as a murderer, nobody knew where."

"I should think the trade of the house would have fallen off," Frazee said, "or were the boys all solid in favor of Miss Lee?"

"As solid as you could expect. Some of them said ugly things about her, but they all knew they could n't get such a good table anywhere else in Magnolia, and most of them were her friends, anyway. It did n't seem as if things could just slip along after Honey died, almost as if nothing had happened, except that Miss Lee did n't have anybody to scold, and there was n't any Honey to joke about;

but they did, and I tell you, Frazee, whenever I saw her working away just the same as ever after all she's gone through, it seemed too unmerciful to bear."

"When did you say all this happened?" asked Frazee, wondering how long Tarleton had been carrying Miss Lee's sorrow on his mind.

"A year ago," answered the younger man.

"Humph," said Frazee, "I should think Randall would have come sneaking back by this time to assert his right to free board at the Magnolia House."

"That's the part I haven't told you," Tarleton answered. "Yesterday word came in that Randall had died. He was heading back, but got into a shooting scrape and was killed."

"How'd she take the news?" asked Frazee, straightening up with renewed interest.

"Oh, quietly," said Tarleton. "She asked me for Pomfret's address."

"Did you give it to her?"

"No, I didn't have it, but I'm going North now to find him."

Frazee took out his notebook. "I can help you out there. I met him on Water Street, just before I went to Florida. He's with a new Kansas City house. Here's his card."

"That's good," Tarleton said. "I'll wire him, and then I can stop off here at Lodi and look over tomato chances."

ON THE NIGHT TRAIN

THE Chicago express had been delayed by a freight wreck down the road and was three hours late when it drew into North Pass. Even the long-houred summer sun, which was usually hanging above the western hills when the train went through, had grown tired of waiting, and had left in its place an ineffectual moon whose light was all swallowed by the velvety dusk of earth and sky. Staring sharply out of the dusk were the open windows of the station and the flitting lanterns of the employees.

Rough, business-like voices gave orders or called back and forth with a heartiness which echoed against the surrounding silence, and heavily laden trucks rumbled across the platform. As they were unloaded the air became sweet with a scent of strawberries which seemed like a part of the outlying night, it so vividly recalled dim, shadowy fields, with the dew softly distilling upon leaves and berries still warm from the sun.

Fraze leaned out of his window and looked around him. Familiar figures crossed and recrossed in front of the flaring station win-

dows, or revealed themselves by a turn of the lantern light, but his own face was dark against the bright interior of the car, and no one noticed him. He was about to call out a greeting to the busy station agent, when a girl with a bunch of vouchers in her hand came across the platform among the lights and the moving forms, passed so close beneath his window that he could have reached out and touched her, and joined a little group of men who were standing near the car steps talking. They turned toward her as she came up, and he heard her give some brief message or word of instruction. Then she came back under his window and he caught a glimpse of her face. It was like the fragrance in the air, seeming to belong to the hushed vitality of the twilight.

A hand clapped him on the shoulder and he turned to find a man he knew smiling down at him.

Commercial travelers are not easily surprised at meeting men they know. They shift in and out of one another's lives like the colored fragments in a kaleidoscope, and if for a moment one helps another in completing a design, at the next turning of the glass they fall apart. Frazee stretched up his hand cordially.

"Hello, Tarleton," he said ; and then ignoring the fact that they had not met before for a

year, asked quickly, "Was that Selma Shepherd that crossed the platform just now? What's she doing around the station?"

Tarleton dropped into the seat beside Frazee and settled himself comfortably, as the conductor's "All aboard!" sounded through the car, and the station lights began to move slowly back along its windows. "She's helping her father, — what do you think of that?" he said.

"Has the old man lost his money?" Frazee questioned while the lights blinked out behind them and the train plunged into the flitting mystery through which travelers approach the future in the night, only to find themselves arriving at the present in the morning.

"Not much," Tarleton answered, "but it's a little like that story of the man that got rich and sent his daughter to school, and when he asked how she was getting on, and they told him she was doing well, only she lacked capacity, he said she should have one if it cost a million dollars. Selma wanted the old man to use a conscience in his business, and as he could n't get hold of one any other way, she's gone into the office to supply it. A queer outcome for a girl like that, is n't it?"

"How did she find out he did n't have one?" Frazee asked. "She used to think" — he let his sentence drop and stared at the frail, tired young moon, sinking low above the hills,

but keeping faithfully abreast of the car windows.

Tarleton glanced at him sideways and smiled a little. "Yes," he agreed, "she used to think that 'Papa' was the blooming Bayard among business men, and when she heard of any other fellow's playing a sharp trick she pointed to her father as an example of how men could succeed without overreaching other people. It was pretty hard to listen to when we all knew what an old sharper he was."

"I never thought him a sharper exactly," Frazee said. "I believe Ans Shepherd always meant to be an honest man; if he had been offered an out and out steal that he knew for a steal, there would have been somebody knocked over then and there. The trouble was with his standards. I should have wanted to wear gloves if I'd been working with his standards, and it seems to me a high-class conscience like Selma's would be a mighty unhandy thing for him in his business. How did it all come about?"

"It's only just happened," Tarleton answered. "The pitiful look has n't gotten out of her face yet,—or else I imagine it, remembering that day. Sometimes I wish I did n't have such a faculty for being in at the death."

"That's a queer thing," Frazee commented. "I believe you are always on hand when

anything happens, and I'm always round the corner, like that fellow Barrie tells about. What happened, anyway? I used to know her pretty well once, years ago."

"It came about through the two shipping associations," Tarleton began. "You know how they manage things in North Pass, — the fruit growers club together and form a shipping association so as to get car-load freight rates, instead of having to pay by the hundred pounds" —

"Oh, go along," said Frazee, "did n't I work this region once for six years?"

"Well, in your day there was only one association, and Ans Shepherd always loaded the cars, but this year some of the people grew dissatisfied, — thought he charged too much for loading, — and formed a new association with Henry Barnum to load at a lower rate. You remember Barnum, don't you?"

"Rather," said Frazee, with a grimace. "I had the pleasure of seeing him through an attack of the jimjams once. On the whole, I think he was the toughest, lowest little devil I ever came across on the road. I had him to thank — well, it's no use talking of that now."

"What was it?" Tarleton asked curiously.

"Oh, nothing," Frazee answered, smiling a little at the corners of a compressed mouth. "I was younger than I am now and more of a fool, and I did n't feel as free as I do now to

speaking out my mind. I was sitting in the railroad hotel dining-room in Middleville when the Cairo train pulled in for dinner, and who should come and drop down at the table with me but Barnum, — it was after I'd seen him through his little snake-dance. He seemed to think he'd found a long-lost brother, and began telling me all he'd been up to since. It was n't a pretty story, and it was n't a prudent place to be telling how he managed to 'creep' extras into his expense account and systematically gouge his firm; and the story of how he spent the extras, barely missing another attack, was n't much more edifying. It disgusted me. I don't usually count myself better than the next man; but I must say I wanted to take that little beast and fling him out of the window; the sight of him turned me against my dinner the way a fly would in my coffee; but you know how it is when you've been good to a fellow and he's grateful to you, — it seems to bind you to be easy on him, — so I just sat and listened, laughing once in a while, and putting in a word, instead of telling him to shut his mouth. I did suggest once that he'd better talk lower, or somebody would overhear, but looking back afterwards that warning seemed to put me more on a level with him than anything else."

"And somebody was overhearing him?" Tarleton asked.

Frazee nodded. "Selma Shepherd was sitting at the table just behind us. She had come on the same train with him, though on a different car, but I did n't see her until we all got up. In fact, Barnum spoke to her before I noticed her. She'd brought a little hand-bag out of the train with her and was carrying it back when he stepped up smirking and asked to take it on board for her. She held onto it, and the look she gave us was enough to freeze a crop. I knew she'd heard every word and classed me with him. That was all, but we'd been friends before. Bah — how it feels to be despised."

Tarleton looked away from his companion and through one of the windows at the soft, pure phantom of a world that hurried past. It looked like a place for peace, for mystery, even for great weird tragedies, but not for all this squalor which the hurrying trains bear to and fro, and which some men call life. "You never explained?" he said.

"Explained!" Frazee echoed cynically; "there was nothing to explain. She asked me no questions, I told her no lies. I could n't go to her and say I was n't as rotten as she thought when she expressed no interest in my state of preservation, — at least I was fool enough to think I could n't. That was a long time ago. For a year or two I wanted to kill Barnum, and then I stopped caring and

realized that he was too low to kill, anyway. I don't see why the North Pass people ever put up that sort of vermin in opposition to old Ans Shepherd. At his meanest Ans was a man."

"Oh, but Barnum reformed, had n't you heard? He went to one of those 'cures,' and came home to North Pass where he was born, and married a poor foolish girl that had kept some sort of faith in him all that time. He started in at farming and was having pretty hard luck, when the shipping association split in two and somebody came forward with the idea that Henry deserved encouragement, and he got the job of loading for the opposition company. Old Ans nearly frothed at the mouth. He could n't forget what Barnum had been, and he thought it was a reflection on his own honor and the honor of North Pass to have him in a position of trust, — particularly a position of trust that would deduct something from the old man's own little harvest of shekels. The old man was great on talking about honor, — caught it from Selma after she came home from college. Well, the short of it was, he decided to run Barnum and the opposition out of the business. He simply sank money in the work, doing the loading for next to nothing, and making the rates so low that after a week every darned kicker gave in and transferred his shipments to the old company.

Barnum was left swinging his heels on the station platform, sending out one half-filled car, perhaps, while the old man sent ten overloaded ones. Of course it could n't go on, and presently Henry resigned and the opposition went to pieces. I tell you old Ans just strutted round North Pass like a turkey gobbler that's got his tail spread and is scraping his wings on the ground to mark off a road for other people to travel in."

Frazee laughed. "I can see him," he said.

Tarleton pointed out of the window. "We're coming to the old quarry. Do you remember the place?"

"No, not specially," answered Frazee.

"Well, just look. You'll see why later," Tarleton said. "Notice the way that side-track goes out to the edge of the bluff."

The train had been rushing hoarsely up grade through a bit of forest. Now, at the summit of the grade, a clearing blurred past, and Frazee half saw and half remembered a spot where the foreground broke off abruptly and a group of derricks rose like evil omens against the dimly lighted distance and the breadth of pale sky where the moon was going down.

"Did you see?" asked Tarleton, as the forest jumped forward and hid the view as if hiding a secret. "The side-track goes out to the edge of the bluff so that the stones from

the quarry below can be hoisted and laid right on the flats. They only work there in winter when there's nothing else going on. When it's deserted it's a creepy-looking place, even by daylight, and if the wind had been the right way you'd have smelled twenty carloads of strawberries fermenting at the bottom of the bluff."

"Twenty carloads of strawberries! How did they get there?" Frazee cried, involuntarily glancing out of the window again, as if the quarry were not already far behind.

"Everybody knows and nobody can bring any proof. Barnum did it, of course, to get even with old Ans."

"But how?" Frazee asked again.

"There was only one way it could be done. One night, a few days after Barnum resigned, the fruit train was pulling up that grade when she was boarded by a masked gang that bound all the train-men, hands and feet, and put them off at the top of the hill, switched the train onto the siding, set her to backing toward the bluff, and skipped out into the woods. There was n't a thing about one of 'em that the train-men recognized, and so far nobody has found a clue. It must have been a strange thing to see that train backing off through the dark to the edge of the bluff and crashing over — like somebody committing suicide. Her boiler burst and the cars took fire, and there

was complete wreck and ruin down there. Of course it was n't long before the station at Elkdale got nervous because the train was so late, and wired to find out about her. Then there was excitement. A hand-car set out at once to find out what had happened to her after she left North Pass, and they wired to Middleville to get a wrecking train ready, but it was never called out, for they found the track clean as a whistle, and there was n't much worth picking up at the bottom of the bluff — just the biggest mess of half-cooked strawberry jam that mortal eyes ever looked at, mixed with battered iron and charred wood. I happened to be at Elkdale with nothing better to do, so I volunteered to come out on the hand-car, and if you'll believe me, I smelled that wreck half a mile away. The night was perfectly still and black as tar, and we were working those handle-bars in silence, all of us feeling a sort of suspense, when, sniff! every man caught the smell of strawberries. We straightened up and the car ran itself for a minute, while we all smelled again to make sure. Then the boss said, 'Boys, she's smashed,' and we fell to, harder than before. You can't tell the surprise it gave us when we found the train-men lying safe and sound at the side of the track, and the track clear, — only that warm rich smell all through the dark, and the men's story, and the smouldering mess

at the foot of the bluff. At first it was pure relief to think that no lives were lost, and then the dastardly meanness of destroying so much property for nothing came over us. Why, it was n't only North Pass that suffered, there were ten car-loads from stations down the line."

"That's the strangest story I ever heard," Frazee said slowly. "Are you sure there was nothing else to account for it— nothing but Barnum's spite?"

"Nothing else in the world. There was such an absence of any other possibility that nobody can imagine who helped him, and that makes it all the harder to get hold of the plot. The company has detectives down there and has offered a reward, and Ans has offered a reward himself. I suppose somebody will turn state's evidence in time, but for the present there's not a straw in the wind to tell tales. It's puzzling where the men come from to do work like that—and objectless, too—but they seem to be always on hand when they're needed."

"I can hardly believe it was Barnum," Frazee said. "I think it must have been some sort of anarchist plot. Barnum would n't have had the nerve."

"If you'd seen him the next few days you would have believed it," Tarleton declared. "He paraded the village as large as life, and

everybody noticed the look in his eyes and his talk ; why, he as good as told people, 'I'm even with you all now, and you can't prove it on me,' — only he was careful not to say it in words that could be turned against him. He was drinking, too, — not enough to tangle his wits, but just enough to make him assertive. That was why he dared speak out to Selma."

"Speak — out — to Selma?"

"Yes, it was two days after the wreck. She had come down to the station on some errand, all dressed in white, — too white to touch, like she always looked, — and Barnum swaggered up into her face and pulled off his hat and bowed. She looked straight through him, her face getting stiff, and tried to walk by, but he stepped in front of her again. I saw it all across the platform. I was in the old man's office. I often did my writing there" —

"Never mind where you were," Frazee interrupted ; "tell what happened."

"That's what I'm coming to," Tarleton answered, settling himself as a man will if he likes to talk and has no intention of doing injustice to his story. Frazee leaned forward, one hand tapping lightly on the window ledge to make his impatience seem more trivial, but with a stress of attention and urgency in his face.

"He stepped right in front of her," Tarleton

went on, "and she was too proud to try a second time to pass him, so she stood still and waited, the way a person that loathes snakes, but is n't afraid of 'em, stands back to let one crawl across his path. I suppose it was that look of holding her skirts aside that maddened him, for after a minute he burst out telling her she'd cut him before, but she'd not cut him again, and she need n't think it would stain her to touch him nor dishonor her to throw him a word like she would to the dirtiest dog on the street. 'If I'm low, it's your father made me so,' he told her; 'and I can't be as low as you are, for there's none of his damned blood in my veins.' She drew back quick, as if he'd struck her, and a lot of men rushed up and got hold of him and tried to pull him away while she came over toward the office. The old man had been up the street, and was just coming onto the platform. He did n't hear, but he saw her face and hurried to meet her, and they were coming into the office where I was writing away for dear life, as if I'd heard nothing, when Barnum broke away from the men and came up behind them, pouring out a stream of abuse and taunting the old man with every shady transaction he'd ever been connected with. The old man pushed Selma inside the door, and turned round to order him off, but Barnum would n't move. He stood his ground, daring Ans to deny a single dishonorable act

he'd charged him with, and Ans saw a troop of men who knew the truth looking on and listening, so there was n't a word he could say. He tried to treat it as a joke and face it down with pompousness, but it all flatted, and he came to a dead stop. For a minute you could almost hear the sun beating down on the platform, it was so still. Barnum stirred once or twice, trying to leer past the old man and catch Selma's eye, but she stood inside the doorway, watching her father. I was watching her, and the way the light faded out of her face made me think of the quick way a cloud fades sometimes after sunset. All at once the telegraph began ticking over in the depot, clear across the platform. Ans gathered himself together as if somebody had spoken to him, and turned round to Selma and me, trying to laugh. She drew back a little from him, and begged him to say it was not true.

"Her face upset him. I don't believe he'd ever realized that anybody could take a question of business dealings in that way, and you could see how sorry he was for her, as if she was a little child that had to be disappointed. He told her to hush, that every man had his enemies, and that there was nothing to feel badly about at all. She put out her hand like a child pleading, — she was n't used to having him refuse her things, — and asked him again to tell them all that it was n't so. He shut the

office door, then, and I was shut inside with them. 'Selma,' he said, 'I can't say it's not true. These things are what every business man does. Tarleton here will tell you so; they're part of the game.' She did n't turn to me, and I thanked the Lord for it. I'd have gone out if I could, but the old man stood right in front of the door and would n't move. I don't know if he thought Barnum would try to come in, or if he only wanted to keep me to help him out with her; but there he planted himself, and she drew back from him a little more, and stood with her bosom rising and falling, and her hands clenched. Great God, I wished she'd have screamed, instead of keeping so still. The old man kept looking at her face as if he could n't look away, and a deathlike ash-color settled over him. After a while he went closer and stretched his hand out as if he was half afraid, and touched her on the shoulder.

"'What's the matter, Selma?' he asked, and his voice was so shaky and scared it did n't sound like his:

"She gave a little cry and shrank away, sobbing out that she'd always thought her father was an honest man. He just opened his mouth and shut it again, and began to shake all over; even his hard old face was broken and twitching as if he was going to cry, and with every minute that he watched

her huddled into a glimmery white heap on the bench, a year of vitality seemed to go out of him. If she'd been looking she'd have seen him grow ten years older before her eyes."

Tarleton paused, drawing a long breath.

"Well?" questioned Frazee sharply.

Tarleton pointed out of the window into the dark. "The little moon's gone down," he said irrelevantly. "It kept up with us as long as it could, but now it's tired out."

Frazee gave a glance at the hovering, mysterious world shadows through which the train was rushing with its flaring lights. The windows of a distant house gleamed out for a moment as if answering the signal of the gleaming train.

Tarleton did not notice his companion's impatience. "When you were quite a kid and first came on the road, did you ever fancy that every unknown lighted house you passed in the night might be the home of the girl you would love and marry some day?" he asked.

"Save that for a moonlight ride with the girl," Frazee advised with a shrug. "I want to know how Selma and the old man settled it."

"After we pass Elkdale," said Tarleton, unmoved.

The train whistled out its long forlorn warning. One by one the lights of a straggling village flashed into the car windows and went

out like matches in the wind ; the train slowed up beside another group of station buildings wrapped by darkness more closely than the first.

Both men jumped up and went outside, — Tarleton because he hoped to find a man with whom he wished a minute's talk, Frazee because the car had become too cramped a place for him. If he sat still by the window he should watch every instant for Selma to pass beneath it, and she would not come.

Outside upon the platform he found the scent of strawberries again, filling the air just as the memory of Selma filled his thoughts. All the days of his old sweet friendship with her had been in strawberry time, and, in the years that had gone by while he was trying to forget her, the unexpected whiff of strawberries along a city street had often brought back the past so vividly that when he looked around him at the pavements and the hard brick walls and the faces which he did not love, although the past faded away, as long as he could smell the strawberries he was filled with a vague, hopeless longing, the Indian summer of pain. On the platform, there was nothing to do but to think of such things, and wonder when the train would start.

Tarleton finished his talking and came back to where Frazee stood watching the man beside the loaded truck pass the strawberry crates to the man in the express car door.

"It's about the last shipment of the season," Tarleton said. "It's a pity that the sun never gets 'em fully soaked with sweetness until just as the crop is playing out. Do you notice the smell of 'em? It's good enough itself to eat with sugar and cream."

"I'm going back into the car," Frazee answered. "They're through loading."

"I bet you that a honey bee could follow this train through the dark by the smell," Tarleton suggested argumentatively as they took their seats. "It must stream out behind us for miles, spreading thinner and thinner like the tail of a comet."

Frazee smiled more to himself than to Tarleton. "I think it does," he agreed. "Now finish up about Selma and her father."

Tarleton stretched himself lazily, looking through half closed eyes, as if summoning back the picture he had allowed to vanish. "I can't say that I ever liked Selma Shepherd," he began finally. "I'm not one of the fellows that like a girl who acts as if she was standing on a shining white cloud looking down at him, but nobody could help admiring some things about her. The old man had had her educated way up above his comprehension, and yet she never let it put a barrier between them. She not only loved him; she was proud of him because he had picked himself up out of the dust when he was a friendless kid, and had made

something of himself. She was n't even ashamed of his breaks in grammar or manners before her friends ; she seemed to think there was no more discredit about it than as if he had been a child. And it has to be said for the old man that he was generous with other people beside Selma. I suppose you're right, he did n't mean to be a sharper, he just thought it was part of the game ; and, after he'd got the money safely in his pocket, nobody was quicker than he to pull it out again if people were in trouble. Why he was as warmhearted " —

Fraze gave an impatient groan. "Don't I know them both ?" he asked. "Can't you go on ?"

"There's scarcely anything more to tell," Tarleton answered. "By and by he went up quite close to her, and then was my chance to have left the office, but I forgot ; I was holding my breath the way he was, waiting for her to look up. If he'd murdered a man he would n't have needed much more punishment ; it simply took his life to have her look away from him, crying over what he had done. I wondered which of them would speak first, for it could n't go on that way, and finally the old man forced her name out, dull and harsh, like the first words a dumb man learns to speak. She lifted her head and looked at him, the tears running down her face, and he reached out his hands, but still he could n't find his

speech, and his face quivered more and more, longing for the words to come and bring her back to him ; at last he said her name again ; she gave another sob at that and buried her face, but he dropped down beside her, crying as hard as she was, and caught her hand and said, 'I — we — I can begin over again, Selma.'

"She looked up and when she saw that old, whitehaired, broken man begging her for a chance to start fresh, she looked at him a little while with her face growing different from what I'd ever seen it, and pretty soon she slipped close into his arms, and said, 'Yes, we can begin over again.' — I made a break then and left the office."

Frazer sat silent, staring at the night. It had grown so dark outside that there was nothing to be seen but groups of firefly sparks winging back from the engine.

After a moment Tarleton began again. "Later in the afternoon the old man hunted me up. He said I'd heard so much he wanted to tell me the end of it. Poor old boy, he turned mighty red over it, not because he was ashamed, but because he was so used to carrying things with a high hand. 'Selma's coming into the office to work with me,' he said. 'There's lots of things I want to consult her about, and it will be handier for me to have her there. I — the fact is, Tarleton, I'm going to do things on a different basis after

this, but I'm too used to my old ways to start in to new ones without help.' And then he asked me if I wouldn't do what I could to make it easy for her down there among the boys. He said he knew some of them had a spite against her because she'd always held herself so high. I spoke of dreading what Barnum might do, but the old man only set his jaw" —

Tarleton hesitated. The import of what he was about to tell came home to him, and he realized that the story which he had begun from the mere love of narration was a message which fate had put into his care. "The old man thought there wasn't much more that Barnum could do," he went on slowly. "He said that Barnum had already nearly ruined Selma's life by making her lose faith in the man she loved."

Frazer rested his elbow against the window ledge and his head against his hand.

"Did the old man say who it was?" he asked.

"No," Tarleton answered. "I'd go back if I were you."

Frazer nodded attentively, and turned toward the window. He was thinking of the girl's face in the dusk, with its look of hidden longing, and he wished that he had reached out and touched her as she passed. The longing in his own heart grew upon the hope which had

been given it, and searched for some further token in the night.

The train rushed on, crossing bridges which reverberated solemnly, toiling up grades, hurrying down them, and hooting at the wagon roads which crossed its track. The lights of another village sparkled through the darkness, and Frazee sprang to his feet.

"Good-by," he said abruptly, as the train slackened speed. "I can catch the down passenger here in an hour."

"Good-by," Tarleton said. "Good luck to you."

They shook hands with a clasp that tingled afterwards, and Frazee swung himself from the car step onto the platform.

The air was full of the scent of the strawberries:

LAWYER MONEY

THE law book publishing house had made a prosperous town of Onawauga. It had been one of those dusty, sleepy Southern villages in which people seem to live by the grace of God, and do not have quite enough of that ; but after the lawyers came everything and everybody woke up and changed. The lawyers did the proof-reading of the law books, and boarded in the village. There was quite an army of them, for in printing houses as well as in court-rooms legal proofs must be scrutinized with the closest care, and it must be done by lawyers, for ordinary proof-readers have not sufficient technical knowledge. They boarded with people who would have hesitated about taking ordinary boarders, and the money which they paid into the family treasuries was usually called "lawyer money."

Onawauga believed that except for the prospect of lawyer money Miss Willie Clark would have married Henry Baudelaire when the firm of Baudelaire & Clark, cotton brokers, made its assignment. Miss Willie and Henry were the firm, for Henry's father had died some years before, and Miss Willie's father broke

down and died under the strain of the losses which preceded the failure. By giving up everything, even their two homesteads, the young people were able to settle honorably with the creditors, and as Henry Baudelaire had just been admitted to the bar, he secured a position in the new publishing house and asked Miss Willie to marry him. It had never occurred to him to ask her before, but after they had faced so much ill luck together it seemed to him only natural that they should face the rest of life, whatever it chanced to be. Moreover, he did not see what else there was for Miss Willie to do. She was homeless and penniless, and the most useful thing she could do was to dance so well that she always had three times as many invitations as there were dances in an evening, and to laugh so that every one who heard her laughed too.

To young Baudelaire's surprise, she laughed when he told her about his position and his plan of sharing profits with her.

"That's mighty sweet of you, Henry," she said; "but I'd rather board lawyers for a living. Everybody's going to."

"But, Willie," young Baudelaire said, and there was bewilderment in his voice, "I've been planning for this a long time. I — we've always been partners, you know."

A queer, gentle look came into her face. "I know," she said; "but your salary is hardly

large enough to divide, and then" — the laugh came again, dimpling across the gentleness — "I suppose it never occurred to you that I might n't want to marry you, did it, Henry?"

"Is there some obstacle?" he asked gravely. "Somebody you care more for?"

A spray of honeysuckle blew across her white dress from the vine that sheltered the gallery. She broke it off and tapped with it on the gallery railing. "N — no," she admitted, "there is n't anybody now, but life is n't ended. Think of all the lawyers coming to town."

It was tantalizing to see her considering the subject with so little prejudice. Her mouth drooped just the least bit at the corners, and her eyebrows were lifted above a pair of wide open hazel eyes with laughter at the back. Young Baudelaire was hurt.

"Willie," he said, "I wish you did n't find it so amusing when I offer you my love and the whole devotion of my life. If there were nothing else, should n't old friendship count for anything?"

For a moment her lips quivered, and then she caught one of his hands in her two. "It's just because it counts so much!" she cried. "Can't you see that I should be wronging it if I — if I married you just for a home? I love you, Henry; you know there is nobody left that I am so fond of. But I don't want to

marry you. I — I want just to stay friends, and keep lawyers to board."

Baudelaire drew his hand away. If it had seemed to him the proper thing for her to keep boarders, he might have been relieved to have the matter settled so; but it did not seem proper, and he was dissatisfied with himself and with her. "It's asking a good deal of a man — just to stay friends," he said moodily.

She looked at him as if his face were a book which she could read — a book which did not hold quite all that she had hoped to find. Her color deepened, and the honeysuckle dropped out of her hands. "It would be asking too much of most men," she said at last, "but not of you. You are more faithful to your friends than any one else I know."

His face brightened. "But now that the Piersons own your house, where would you keep your boarders?" he asked. On the plea of old friendship he could yield his point with greater ease.

"Mr. Pierson does n't want to move in here," she said. "He was intending to rent or sell; and so I rented the house from him this morning, and everything will go on just as though it were still mine."

"Oh, Willie," Baudelaire cried, "you'll not have to break up or leave your home! The Stormants want me to move at once." He was silent a moment, trying to keep the

look of pain out of his face. Parting with his home was the one irreparable sorrow that their losses had brought him. It would wrench his heart to leave the old place. He loved it in every detail with the unreasoning love which is the instinct of faithful natures. To turn Henry Baudelaire out of the house where he had been born and had lived always was like turning a helpless child into the street.

He looked up suddenly. "I don't believe I can ever bear seeing them live in my house!" he broke out. "Sometimes I feel as if I must leave the town. I suppose you think me a fool, but if I can help it I will never even walk past the house after they take possession. It would n't hurt so much to see it burned down as to see other people living in it."

He was staring straight in front of him, and he did not see how her eyes dwelt on him until they brimmed up with tears. She turned away and looked off into the garden. The summer sunshine quivered through the air, falling on blight and bloom. It questioned nothing; it demanded nothing; it gave itself without return. The broad green trees spread out their branches in silence, taking all it gave. She turned again toward Baudelaire and looked at his fine, gentle, patient face. There were lines which it lacked, and other lines which atoned. He did not feel her gaze, and she hesitated. At last she put out her hand and touched his arm.

"Henry," she said, "my house will be more like home to you than any other after you leave yours ; won't you be one of the lawyers I am going to board ?"

Baudelaire started, and put his hand over hers with a look of pleased, touched surprise. He had forgotten it was asking a good deal — just to stay friends. "That's mighty sweet of you, Willie," he said ; "I'll come."

It took the village a long time to accept the fact that the two young people did not intend to marry. Whenever more than one cake was baked on the same day in Miss Willie's kitchen, the rumor of it was likely to spread as wedding cake. Miss Willie's white dresses were a source of constant perturbation ; Miss Willie wore white dresses a great deal of the time, and each new one might be intended for a wedding gown. But neither Miss Willie nor Henry Baudelaire faded or looked aggrieved over the everyday uses to which the cakes and the dresses were applied, and so the village gave up worrying at last, and contented itself with taking pride in the young people.

Miss Willie was pointed out to strangers as an example of the dauntless way in which Southern women cope with misfortune. She usually had six lawyers in the house, including Baudelaire, and she smiled on all of them, retaining a little air of sovereignty over them which a Northern woman would have been

likely to lay aside after her first girlhood had passed and left her an old maid or a girl bachelor. Miss Willie was neither ; she was simply Miss Willie. If she churned sillibubs and made pineapple ices to refresh her lawyers in the warm days, she did not scorn a rose in her hair and a dimple in her cheek when she let them fetch and carry for her in the evenings. It was inevitable that sooner or later each of them should have his little dream of persuading her to turn away the others and board him alone ; but she seemed to think that if one lawyer was good, six were better, and she kept the honors easy between them. Baudelaire, looking on from the vantage ground of privileged old friendship, felt no pangs of jealousy. It struck him that she had ordered her life wisely. He had never supposed that she had such executive ability, and he believed that she was happier in exercising it, all the way from the cook in the kitchen to the most sentimental of her boarders on the moonlit gallery, than she would have been if she had married him and let him take care of her with his narrow income. They could never have rented her old home, but would have been obliged to live in some totally strange place.

Unknown to himself, Henry Baudelaire was set up as a model to the younger men, because his life fell into such a quiet routine that most of his coming and going was between Miss

Willie's and the publishing house. His ways were so settled that he seemed to grow old faster than Miss Willie, who worked harder than he; there was something eager about her face which kept it young, and after ten years, although she was thirty, she might still have been taken for twenty-five, while at thirty-five Baudelaire could have passed for forty.

One evening when Miss Willie was sitting on the gallery all alone, watching the sun sink in the west, she saw Henry Baudelaire coming along the walk. He was tall, slender, and a trifle stooped, with a touch of gray about the temples and a grave, sad expression which had become habitual to him.

She leaned forward and smiled when he reached the steps, for he looked as if he were about to stop and speak; but through the open doorway he saw two of the other lawyers, Harley Smith and Alvin Dane, come from opposite rooms and run into each other in the hall on their way out to join her. A spark of mischief sprang into Baudelaire's grave eyes and he passed on.

Alvin Dane was a frail looking young man, with a manner so courteous that he was always standing aside. Harley Smith was more rugged, with a sensitive face dominated by high cheek-bones. Dane bowed, stepped back, and, when he saw Smith going straight toward Miss Willie, returned to his room.

"I'm not glad to see you," Miss Willie said to Smith with a frankness that might be taken for what it was worth. "Henry Baudelaire was going to stop and talk to me, and you made him change his mind and go upstairs."

"I don't blame him, but I thank him," Smith declared. "In some cases half a loaf is worse than no bread."

"You may think so," she retorted; "I don't."

"I'm not in a mood for sparring," Smith replied. He stood silent a moment, staring at nothing. "Is it true that Baudelaire has never gone in sight of his old home since the Stormants moved into it?" he asked.

Miss Willie picked up a spray of honeysuckle and lightly whipped the railing of the gallery.

"I don't know; he does n't tell me what he does," Miss Willie answered.

Smith glanced down at her curiously. "I thought you were old friends?"

"So we are, and you know what that means. Good-morning in the morning and good-evening at night. I get tired of old friendship."

"What's the matter?" he asked, laughing softly. "Have you had to change cooks again, or what has put you out of temper?"

"Just having you come out here when I wanted to talk to Henry Baudelaire," she declared. "You see, I think as much of him as he does of his old house."

"But I thought you did n't know how much he thought of his old house."

"I did n't say that. I said I did n't know if he'd seen it for ten years or not, but I reckon he has n't, for ten years ago he told me he did n't expect ever to go near it." She looked up into Smith's sensitive, half-aggressive face with shadowed eyes. "It's a long time to be faithful like that, is n't it?" she continued in a different voice.

"I don't know; I could be faithful longer than that — to some things."

The sun was setting through a rosy haze. Miss Willie turned and steadfastly faced the great, red, lonely sphere. "I wish," she said slowly; "I wish you knew him better. He is so quiet — so unassertive — that people do not understand that just as he has been faithful for ten years to his love for his home, just so faithfully and quietly he would give his life for a friend. I dream sometimes of seeing him back in the old place. Would n't it be beautiful if one of the men who wronged him out of money when we failed should be conscience-smitten and send it back? Then he could live in his old home."

Smith felt in his waistcoat pocket, took out a roll of bills, and handed it to her.

She drew away from it, startled. "What's that?" she asked.

"That is money," he answered; "because I'm your boarder and this is pay-day."

"Oh," she said, "I had forgotten about payday. I thought" — she laughed nervously. "I don't know why I was so surprised, only we were not talking about board money, you know."

"Perhaps you thought I was one of the men who had wronged Baudelaire, and that you had moved me to make restitution," he suggested bitterly. "No ; there is no likelihood of my ever wronging Baudelaire. I should n't scruple to, but I have no chance."

"I don't understand you."

He leaned toward her, holding her gaze with cruel, suffering eyes. "If you tried you could guess what I'd like to take away from Baudelaire," he asserted. "You can guess what you've never given me a chance to say."

She drew her white face farther from him. "You can guess what I would answer," she said coldly. "I thought — I thought you were my friend, Mr. Smith."

"Old or new ?" he taunted.

"That did not matter," she declared, rising. "I thought we understood each other, and I needed a friend."

"Forgive me," he said huskily. "I could n't be your friend." A spasm of pain crossed his face ; he controlled it with an effort and held out his hand. "Good-by."

"Good-by," she said.

He dropped her hand and walked down the

avenue. She watched until the gate clicked behind him ; then she sat down, resting her elbows on the gallery railing and her head in her hands. "So !" she exclaimed below her breath. Her face was pale still, and her eyes shone. The sun sank slowly out of sight and the west began to fade. "It's all in the bargain," she thought to herself. "He will go, and another who will pay the same board will come."

Somebody clattered down the stairs. At the same instant a door on the first floor opened. The hall must have been growing dusky ; she could hear the man from upstairs run into the man who was coming out of the door.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Alvin Dane's voice. He retreated into his room, and the other man came out on the gallery.

Miss Willie did not turn. Her boarder walked up behind her and dropped a little roll of bills into her lap.

"Better count it," he said, leaning on the back of her chair.

She looked up at him. He was younger than Harley Smith—scarcely more than a boy—and his long, thin young face was fitted for all the twists and quirks of expression which win indulgent love. "Mr. Sargent, you tell me that every time you pay me your board money. I think it's time you said something else."

"Do you know why I tell you that?"

"Oh, I suppose it's because you think I'm so mercenary — and so I am. You lawyers would bring suit against me if you knew what a lot of your money I'm hoarding up. Do you know that every time the ice cream runs short it's because I've tied an extra quarter up in an old stocking?"

"It never did run short, and you're not mercenary, and I've a very different reason for telling you to count your change," he declared.

"Well, what is it? Can't you count?"

His eyes shifted from her face to the chair back, and he twisted his mouth in amused, persuasive embarrassment. "I'll tell you," he said. "There's something I always throw in with my board money, and I'm afraid some day it will mix my count. That would n't be fair, for the thing I throw in does n't do you any good. It's just my love."

The tears sprang into Miss Willie's eyes. "I think it's mighty sweet of you to throw that in with the money," she said, "and it does do me good. I shall keep it — keep it safe for you until you want to give it to some other girl. Don't think for a minute that I'm not glad to have it."

"It's yours — to keep always," he said.

She laughed tenderly. "I'm glad you think so. It wouldn't be worth having if you did n't."

"But — what can I do?" The little tricks of persuasion had all gone out of his face, and his eyes held too much sadness.

"Oh, how can I tell you?" she asked in a low, sharp voice. "It seems to me that life is too hard on us. I may have been selfish and mercenary and wrapped up in my own purpose, but God knows I never meant to make you or any one suffer."

The sunset had all faded and the moon had not yet risen. She stretched her hand up to him with a little motion of appeal. Sargent caught it. It was white and cold; he laid his cheek against it for an instant, and when he spoke there was a sob in his breath. "Should I have any chance if I were as old as the other men?" he asked.

"My poor boy," she said tremulously; "not the least in the world."

A heavy footstep sounded on the stairs Sargent straightened himself and walked off into the dark.

At the same time some one lighted the swinging lamp in the hall, and turning, Miss Willie saw a portly man in the doorway.

She hailed him. "Come here and talk to me, Colonel Davis; you're just the one I want to give me some advice."

The Colonel was panting a little, as if he had come upstairs instead of down. "Don't expect me to give you straightforward advice,"

he puffed gallantly, "because when you ask for it you turn my head."

"Trust me to turn it back again," she retorted, "for I want your calm, dispassionate counsel."

The colonel drew a chair raspingly across the gallery floor and seated himself. "If you want anything of that sort you should consult Henry Baudelaire," he said.

Miss Willie was in the shadow, but her voice showed that she had drawn herself upright. "Colonel Davis," she said slowly, "there is no doubt that Henry Baudelaire has the ablest mind of any one of my acquaintance, and in any ordinary matter I should consult him. In this case his warm affection for me would bias his judgment, while you, a comparative stranger, can be dispassionate if you choose."

"A comparative stranger!" the colonel ejaculated. "Bless my soul!"

"Yes," Miss Willie repeated; "a comparative stranger."

The colonel leaned back into the light, showing a comfortable round face with a heavy double chin. He put his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat and smiled incredulously. "I think I remember doing myself the honor of asking you to marry me a year ago last Christmas Eve," he said.

"That is something any stranger may ask — if he thinks it best," Miss Willie returned.

"And I think you told me that you esteemed me very highly, and hoped our friendship would remain unbroken by your preference for single blessedness — or words to that effect," the colonel went on.

"I — please don't shout," suggested Miss Willie.

The colonel dropped his voice to a key more in keeping with the surrounding silence and secrecy. "That's not the way people talk to strangers," he whispered.

"I said a *comparative* stranger," Miss Willie declared.

"U — um," said the colonel. He kept his peace a little while, considering what was the standing of a person who was not a stranger to Miss Willie even by comparison. Miss Willie was silent also. She realized that she had marred her chance of getting good advice from the colonel, and the knowledge did not lend her calm.

"H — hm," the colonel began after a time; "I had hoped — the relations which I considered friendly between us had led me to hope that at some time it might be permissible for me to renew my suit, but your tone to-night discourages me."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"H — hm," commented the colonel. He took his thumbs out of his waistcoat and looked down at the broad white expanse illuminated

by the hall lamp. It was evident that he thought Miss Willie was missing a good thing and a good deal of it.

Miss Willie patted the gallery floor with her foot. In the black night, far beyond the garden, some negroes went singing down the street.

Inside the house some one tramped to the head of the stairs and called, "Daddy, didn't you go for the mail?"

"No, son," the colonel answered over his shoulder; "I've been talking to Miss Willie."

There were running footsteps on the stairway, and a plump, round-faced young man came out on the gallery.

"You might go now, Daddy," he suggested.

"Why don't you go?" asked the colonel.

The young man laughed. "Because it's my turn to talk to Miss Willie."

Miss Willie rose and gave her chair an impatient push across the boards. "What if I don't want to be talked to? What if I'm cross and tired?"

"Then son and I'll both go to the post-office," said the colonel promptly. He put his arm through the young man's and drew him toward the steps.

Miss Willie stood with her hands on the railing of the gallery. She was trembling from head to foot. "This will never do—I shall lose them all!" she told herself. Young

Davis turned toward her, half resisting his father. "Go on, go on," she said gently; "but I shall be rested to-morrow night."

"Wait a minute," the colonel panted. He gave a vigorous jerk to his son's arm, as if to fix him where he stood, and went back up the steps, fumbling in one of his pockets. Half mechanically Miss Willie put out her hand. He laid a roll of bills in it. "For the two of us," he said; "and — ah — will you desire that this should make any difference in our — ah — arrangements?"

"Not unless you wish it," she told him.

He puffed gratefully. "By no means, and — ah — thank you," he said. He turned down the steps, took his son by the arm again, and walked him off down the fading avenue of light from the hall door.

"It's the muffins, or the waffles, or the coffee — or all of them," Miss Willie thought. She went wearily into the hall. Under the swinging lamp Alvin Dane met her with a crisp bill in his hand. His face was wistful. "Are you going in from the gallery?" he asked.

"Yes; I'm very tired. Did you want to talk to me?"

His thin, gentle face colored warmly. "I — Miss Willie, I always want to talk to you, but another evening will do as well. I started to come out once or twice, but there was always some one ahead of me."

"You should have come just the same. I should have been glad," she said. She started up the stairway, but turned before she reached the landing. "Mr. Dane," she asked, "if you wanted to give another person a gift and not have him know from whom it came, what would you do?"

"Why, I hardly know," the young man said. He glanced around him in a deprecating way, as if seeking for some one whom he might allow to answer first. As there was no one there he looked back at the white figure on the stairs. "Why, perhaps," he suggested with a light, uneasy laugh, "if it were not too large, I might slip it under his plate at table."

"That's so," Miss Willie laughed. "Good-night."

She went upstairs to her own room, lighted a lamp and put away all the money excepting one bill, which she kept in her hand; then she took the lamp, went back into the hall, peered all around her cautiously, and when she was sure that no one saw her, opened a door which led to another stairway, and went tip-toeing up into the garret.

It was a big place, and the lamp only half lighted it. A night breeze came in at the window, mysteriously fluttering garments which hung from pegs, and making the lamp flare. She put the lamp on a shelf, selected a key from a bunch which hung at her waist,

sat down by a trunk and unlocked it. In the tray there was a small box which she took out and opened. It was full of money ; she began counting the bills and metal pieces until her lap and the floor around her were strewn with orderly little piles of cash. There were twenty of the piles, and each of them amounted to a hundred dollars.

"You might slip it under his plate at table," she murmured.

Nearly all the bills were fresh and clean, and yet she fingered them disdainfully. They crackled with a dry, ungrateful sound. Against the wall outside the branch of a china-tree, which she and Henry Baudelaire had planted together, kept tapping, tapping like a ghost. A big tear splashed down on one of the piles of money. She lifted her head, clasped her hands together, and strained her gaze toward the dark opening of the window. "How can I give it to him so that he will never know?" she thought. The black square of the window blurred out of sight. She buried her head in her hands and her tears pattered down on the bills. She was thinking of Baudelaire, happy in his old home, and of herself, still boarding lawyers, alone in hers.

She looked up with a start, as if some one had touched her. A few feet away Baudelaire was standing, staring at the hundred-dollar stacks. She stared at him, too dazed to wipe

her eyes. His own little roll of bills was crushed unnoticed in one of his hands, and his face was shocked, as if he were weighing her years of unremitting toil against the value of her hoarded money.

"Willie, what have you saved this for?" he demanded.

She picked up a fold of her white dress and pressed it against her lips. His disapproval choked her, and his eyes would not let her look away. She rose, letting the money drop around her.

"Why," she faltered, "it's for you." She stretched out her hands to him. "Oh, Henry!" she pleaded.

"For me!" he echoed. It took a moment for the meaning of the words to reach him; then he stepped back from her, and she saw that he was white around the mouth. "Thank you," he said; "you must take me for somebody else. You can give your money to some other man."

"But it's to buy back your house!" she cried. "It's because you've been so sad, so homesick all these years."

Baudelaire's pale lips narrowed to a line. He opened them once to answer, but locked the words back savagely. When she laid her hand on his arm he shook it off.

She stepped back in her turn, wondering at the flame of resentment in his eyes. Her

cheeks grew so hot that the tears dried on them. "I am not aware of having insulted you in any way," she said bitterly. "I supposed we were old enough friends to offer each other either money or service and not come to blows. This is money which I have not needed. It has been my pleasure to think that some time there would be enough of it to buy back your house and wipe out the last trace of our disaster. I meant to find some way to give it to you so that you should never know where it came from. I thought you might have some foolish scruple, though I never dreamed you would take offense — but why should there be subterfuges between us two?"

She choked back a sob and stood wordless for a moment, her burning face confronting his pallid one, the yellowed dusk of the lamplight stretching between.

"To see you so homesick that you could not go in sight of your old house," she murmured at last; "it has been more than I could bear."

"And you thought I would accept money from you — from any woman?" he broke out. "I'm grateful for your good opinion."

"It is evident that we have ceased to be friends," she retorted; "but our business relations have never ceased, and there is no more reason why you should refuse to take money from me than I from you. I have always

understood that a woman's honor was to be guarded in such matters, but I take your money without a qualm."

"Take my money! You take it in return for board."

"Well, if there is no friendship left—if you will not take it because we grew up like brother and sister, and because you can give me more pleasure by taking it than in any other way—if there must be 'value received' between us, then I beg you to take it as a matter of business restitution. You know very well that papa made mistakes just at the end; his judgment failed; he made things worse, and"—her voice had grown tremulous—"and I surely have a right to make good any loss he caused—to restore his honor."

Baudelaire's lips quivered. "Willie," he said, "your father's honor has never suffered through me. There is no dishonor in the mistakes of a man overpowered by misfortune; and besides, I loved him. Don't talk to me of making good the loss he caused. There may be men who would think any excuse good for accepting money you've slaved to earn, but I'm not one of them."

She clutched her hands together, and the color faded out of her face until she was as white as he. "Is there nothing that can make you take it?" she asked. "With each dollar I brought here I thought how it would make

you happy. I — it made life worth while. I had nothing else to care about — nothing else to work for." Her eyes were heavy with tears. She looked away so that he could not see her face.

All the years when she had seemed so well contented passed before him — years of toil for him. He saw her stealing up the garret stairway with her coins and bills to hide until there were enough of them to make him happy. She had thought that he would take her money and go his way, leaving her working on alone, and yet she had nothing else to work for, nothing else to care about, except to buy back the house he loved. Suddenly he passed his hand across his forehead; then he dropped it at his side and stood staring at her. After a long time he cleared his throat.

"Willie," he said, "I have n't seen that house in ten years."

"I know. Why are you so cruel to yourself and to me?"

He was silent again, and the branch of the china-tree scraped impatiently upon the wall. "Willie," he began again, "even if I could accept your money honorably, I don't believe it would pay me to go back."

"Pay you? I don't know what you mean."

He leaned against one of the posts which supported the roof. "I've always supposed that I wanted to go back," he mused aloud; "I don't know when it was that I changed."

"Henry Baudelaire," she asked sharply, "do you mean that you don't want to go back and live in your old house?"

"Ten years is a long time," he said. He passed his hand over his forehead again; then he stepped forward and took hold of her arm. She could feel him trembling. "Listen, Willie," he begged. "Just now, when you began to talk to me about buying back my old house, I was angry; any man would have been to think you expected him to take your money." He paused, and they could hear a shutter slamming somewhere in the rising breeze.

"Well?" she prompted.

"I was angry, and yet after a little I began to picture it to myself—the going back. I thought how pitiful it was that you should want so much to have me go, and I should want so much to go, and yet it should be impossible. I thought how it would have been if the money had come to me in some other way, and I saw myself walking all alone toward the gate and feeling—oh, such happiness!"

"Just as you would," she said.

"Wait! I could see myself go in at the gate and walk up the drive, looking all around me, like a boy home from school; but, Willie, I did n't quite know what I was looking for, and I began to feel lonesome in a queer, vague way. It took only an instant to think it all—

it was just one thought. I hurried along the drive and was running up the steps of the house, when, Willie, what do you think I found?"

She shook her head.

He put his other hand on her shoulder and looked into her eyes. "Some men would n't tell you this, Willie, or if they did they would say it was a long time ago; but it was n't a long time ago; it was just now. I was running up the steps of the house, when I found it was not my old house I had come to; it was this house — it was yours."

She felt herself quivering as he looked at her. She could not meet his eyes. "Well?" she asked again in a breaking voice.

"That is almost all," he said. "I tried to put my house in the place of yours, and I could n't — it would n't come back to my mind. It was your house I saw." He drew her close to him, bending so that he could see her face. "Willie," he pleaded, "were you coming to meet me at the door?"

She gave a little sob and buried her face on his shoulder. She could feel his arms holding her closer, and his cheek against her hair. The breeze from the window stirred around them, rustling the crisp bills which would buy back her own house, the house which they both loved. Outside in the black night some negroes came singing up the street.

Suddenly Miss Willie lifted her head. "What will my lawyers say?" she asked.

A look of mischief came into Henry Baudelaire's eyes. "It is my impression," he said, "they will say, 'Good-by.'"



THE BEAU OF 'ARRIETTE

LIGHTS gleamed from old Captain Beaujeais's house and out across the wind-swept bay. All the boats that came through the drawbridge laid their courses with the front windows as a beacon, and all the boats coming down from the back bay tacked laboriously to and fro against the southeast gale, trying to make headway toward the windows at the side. The boats were many that night, for the creoles for miles and miles along the coast were on their way to the wedding of Narcisse Tiblier, from Pointe des Chênes, to the captain's daughter 'Arriette. It was heavy weather for such prudent sailors to be venturing out, but there are not many weddings a year on the shores of Pontomoc Bay, and not many brides as fair to see as 'Arriette. The young men in particular threw their strength on to their tillers with pleasant anticipation, while the pale phosphorescent foam boiled up about the bows of their boats and rushed sparkling over the lee rails. They were remembering that it was a Pontomoc custom for every one to kiss the bride. If any young man was bashful, or piqued at her selection of a bride-

groom, it made no difference; his friends pushed him forward and cut off all retreat. Some of the most bashful and most piqued among them were sincerely grateful that they would have no choice.

'Arriette was dressed and waiting. The hour had not yet come, but she was already wondering why Narcisse Tiblier was so late. She kept going to her little mirror and looking at herself, tilting it this way and that to get a fuller view; for the vision was reassuring. She would have been blind if she had not seen that she looked just as a bride should look — young, happy, confident, beautiful, in white from head to foot. Narcisse was certainly very foolish to be late.

When she was tired of the mirror, she went to the window and looked out across the bay at the whitecaps rolling up, rank on rank, each one lighting its own swath over the dark, troubled water, to break against the marsh. The lanterns of the approaching boats danced up and down, but their sails showed too dimly for recognition. Once the girl put her hands up to her lips, sailor fashion, and whispered very softly out into the dark, "Narcisse!"

Old Mme. Beaujeais came to the door, her black eyes gleaming with suppressed excitement: for the guests were coming thick and fast; their voices followed her in a babel of greetings, pleasant outcries, and laughter.

'Arriette laughed, too, because she was very sorry to be found at the window. "Enough of people coming," she said in French.

"Enough of peopl' w'en dere is not yet a groombride!" the old woman exclaimed. She had an odd way of speaking English instead of French when there was any stress upon her mind, just as she would have chosen any other violent exercise; and the greater the stress, the more backhanded her English became. "Can yo' be marry widout a gr-oombride?" she went on. "Ah, I am glad, me, dat yo' groombride does not come. Eet ees faw dat yo' tell 'im not to put 'imself in de way too soon! Oh, I shall go hout, me, an' tell dem all: 'Eet ees de fault of 'Arriette; she tell 'er beau not to put 'imself in de way too soon.' I was not like dat, me; eet was nevah me w'at tol' yo' papa 'e goin' to be in de way too soon."

"But," cried 'Arriette, "there is plenty of time. It is not yet the hour."

"Den w'at faw yo' stand at de window, a-ah?" cried Mme. Beaujeais. "Oh, de peopl' tell me w'en dey come in, dey say: 'Ah, Mme. Beaujeais, we see 'Arriette standin' at de window. Ees eet dat 'er groombride 'as not yet come?'"

'Arriette flushed a trifle, and dropped her hands straight at her sides to keep from toying with her wedding-veil — the crowning glory,

without which the poorest creole girl would scarcely feel that she was married. "I don't care how many people see me looking out for Narcisse," she said. "Is it not that we are to be married to-night?"

Mme. Beaujeais spread her hands forward, disconnecting herself entirely from any information on the subject. "Who lives will see," she said, dropping for a moment into the language she could speak; then, scrambling out of it, she added: "Gawd know! Eet ees not de way yo' papa marry me — to be so scare' 'e be a troubl' dat 'e wait till de chickens 'ave teeth befo' 'e come. 'E was dere in de mawnin', 'im."

'Arriette smiled, and took her mother's thin, witch-like face between her hands. The old men along the coast would have told you that Mme. Beaujeais had been a beauty in her time, but only the bitterest of 'Arriette's disappointed lovers liked to have them remember that she had looked like 'Arriette. "Ah, mamma," the girl said, "I hear there was more than one would have been glad to come, if they had had the good luck. They would have taken the moon by the teeth to get you, you were so beautiful. But we don't need to quarrel about Narcisse; he will be here soon enough."

"Ah?" said the old woman, turning one cheek and then the other, with an air of suf-

ferance, while the girl kissed her. No one would have guessed that 'Arriette had not committed some grave offense, or that the old woman was treasuring each caress in her memory against the days when her daughter would belong to Narcisse Tiblier, and not to her—to Narcisse Tiblier, who should have been there at least an hour before the time, to show that he could not wait. Mme. Beaujeais shook herself free of 'Arriette. "Bettah save yo' kisses faw yo' groombride," she said sharply. "I 'ave not the time, me. I must hamuse all doze peopl' so dey will not be haware 'ow eet ees shockin' of 'im not to come."

The girl lifted her hand. "Hush!" she said. "He is coming now. Don't you hear him call?"

"'Ear 'im call!" cried Mme. Beaujeais, in excitement. "Dat would be de mos' shock-in'" — She stood as if petrified, listening to the half-wild, half-plaintive yodel that mingled with the rush of the wind. 'Arriette ran to the window and answered, her clear voice rising and falling in a cadence very sweet to hear.

The moon had struggled out through driven storm-clouds, and she could see the boat—Narcisse's boat—come sweeping toward the pier, its great sail rising white above the marsh.

All the guests in the parlor and in the big hall heard the two calls, and came running out. Never had bride and bridegroom been so unconventional before. "Eef eet ees not de greates' shockingness," muttered Mme. Beaujeais, over 'Arriette's shoulder. "W'en I was marry" — She tried to draw the girl away from the window, but the girl leaned farther out. The wind caught her veil and fluttered it like a signal in the bright light from within.

A snapping of canvas and a rattling of tackle came in answer from the boat. The great white sail jibed over with a crash, and before the straining sheet-rope could run free the boat capsized.

The call died on 'Arriette's lips. She jumped like a boy through the window, veil and all, and ran down the path toward the wharf. Quick as she was, half a dozen men were before her, and a rowboat put off from the landing just as she reached it. But the men were all laughing. They had no more fear that Narcisse Tiblier would drown than they would have had if he had been a cork, and they pictured what a sorry looking bridegroom he would be in his drenched clothes.

"'Ello, 'Arriette," some one called; "bettah mague yo' veil into a fishin'-line an' go fishin' faw yo' beau."

'Arriette stood and waited, feeling sud-

denly foolish, yet half frightened still, and half defiant. If she and Narcisse had not agreed on that childish pleasure of hailing each other as he came up to the pier, if she had not stood at the window where her veil fluttered out and caught his eye, he would not have been taken off his guard, and the sail would not have jibed. Narcisse was one of the best sailors on the coast, otherwise he would not have been on his way to marry old Captain Beaujeais's daughter ; for the old captain measured all suitors by a nautical standard. He was standing beside 'Arriette now, muttering disconsolately, "The seamanship! the seamanship!" At her other elbow, her mother kept repeating, "De shockingness!" while 'Arriette's thought was, "If he should be hurt!"

The moments seemed long before the boat came back, and it came back in silence. The people stopped laughing, and, in their turn, began questioning if he was hurt.

"We cannot tell," a voice said from the boat. "He is stunned and cannot speak."

The boat shot alongside of the pier, and strong hands lifted out the dark, relaxed form of Narcisse. His face was so white in the moonlight that Mme. Beaujeais tried to pull 'Arriette back ; but 'Arriette walked beside the men who carried him up to the house. Her heart was hushed ; it was too sad a time for grief.

In the parlor, under the lights which had been guiding him, they laid him down. There was a long bruise upon his forehead, and some one tried again to draw 'Arriette away ; but she knelt beside him, waiting to see all, and know. Her face was as white as his, and the water from his drenched clothing stained her wedding gown.

Old Mme. Beaujeais directed everything, working over Narcisse like a remorseful fury, for she felt that in some mysterious way it was her fault that he had been struck by the boom. On the wall a great round clock ticked off the seconds as slowly and solemnly as if it were measuring off the future years. The hour of the wedding came, and the strokes which sounded it seemed to fall on each listener's heart. Then the ticking of the clock went on.

Mme. Beaujeais rose to her feet and went away. A flutter of life had crossed Narcisse's face, and when he opened his eyes she wished him to see no one but 'Arriette. The girl bent over him, her pale face framed in white, a smile of welcome trembling on her lips.

A few people turned and left the room ; others looked down, and others looked at 'Arriette. Narcisse opened his eyes and stared at her. "Where am I? What has happened?" he asked.

There was a vacant look in his face which frightened the girl.

"You have been hurt," she said softly, "but now you will be well again. Your sail jibed just at the pier, and the boom struck you."

"I do not remember," Narcisse said, and closed his eyes.

'Arriette waited, feeling as perhaps souls feel when there is some delay at the gate of heaven. Narcisse had looked so strange, but he was alive and had spoken to her. The joy of it surged through her heart and through her head. Once she remembered all the people who must be rejoicing with her, and she glanced round at them and smiled.

At last he opened his eyes again. They had the same confused wonder in them. He looked at her a long time, and then something that he had been groping for seemed to come back into his mind. His lips moved, and she bent a little closer, thinking he would greet her in some way; she felt as if he had been away for years.

But he only recalled what she had told him when he looked at her before. "I do not remember," he muttered slowly, and then tried to sit up, but sank back, groaning. When the pain grew less, he half smiled at her. "I did not remember, but I can feel it now," he said. His eyes roamed about the room in perplexity. There were lights and flowers, and people crowding near in their gala clothes. "Where am I?" he repeated.

"Right here — right at the house," 'Arriette answered. "You know, you were just at the pier when the boat went over."

"What pier?" asked Narcisse. "This is not Point des Chênes."

'Arriette could not keep her voice from quivering. The delay at the gate of heaven was growing very long. "Papa's pier, Narcisse," she explained, and then hesitated a moment. There was one thing he could not have forgotten. She felt as if she must gather him up like a child against her heart, but she only bent a little closer and spoke very quietly. "You know this is our wedding-night," she said.

He looked at her white-clad figure bending over him, and straight into her brimming eyes, and his own gaze grew troubled. "I am sorry," he said, "but I do not remember."

'Arriette was silent, pressing her hand against her heart. The people stirred a little; they could not bear to have her ask another question. Old Mme. Beaujeais came up softly and stood beside her daughter. The girl bent a little closer to the prostrate man. "Do you remember *me*, Narcisse?" she asked.

It was hard even for a bewildered man. He put his hand up to his head, trying to think. "No," he said at last, "I cannot remember you; but if this is your wedding-night I wish you joy."

'Arriette shrank back with a little cry that rang afterward in people's ears. Old Mme. Beaujeais's cheeks were wet. She lifted the girl tenderly, and led her from the room.

The old captain and the guests stood gazing at Narcisse. He rose slowly to his elbow, and looked at them, and they saw that they were all strangers to him. "If any of you know where I live," he said, his voice sharp with pain, "I would be thankful if you would take me home."

The old captain hurried forward, swallowing a sob. "Yes, yes; that will be best," he declared, helping to raise the young man to his feet. "When you have slept you will remember, Narcisse. It was the seamanship, the bad seamanship" — The captain choked, and brushed his hand across his eyes. There would be no wedding on his daughter's wedding-night, on account of Narcisse's seamanship. "Ah," he muttered, leading toward the door, "it was not like this when I was married."

The guests huddled back, making way, then followed to the pier. Some of Narcisse's friends helped him down into one of their boats, and the old captain turned to the people still standing near him. "Good-night," he said. "Narcisse will remember to-morrow, and when he is well you shall come again."

They all embarked sorrowfully. Their sails

were raised, the wind filled them, and the boats glided from the pier, leaving the lights of the old captain's house shining behind them across the wind-swept bay.

It was the saddest wedding-night there had ever been in Pontomoc, but people said to one another that by the next day Narcisse could not help remembering; and his friends took him to the little new house in which he and 'Arriette were to have lived. Narcisse had been staying in it for the last few weeks because it was so near, and it did not seem possible that he could waken there and still forget.

But Narcisse slept and wakened, and did not remember. He looked about the house curiously, and was puzzled when they told him it was his. The years of his coming and going about Pontomoc had dropped from his reckoning, and he counted himself a stranger on the bay.

Weeks passed, and it was still the same. 'Arriette was very brave. She said that he would remember soon, and insisted that no one should tell him he had been on his way to marry her that night. At first she went often to visit him, hoping that the past would come to life sometime when he looked at her; but her pale face only brought back the time when he had opened his eyes to find her bending over him. He knew that in some mys-

terious way he had given her pain that night, and he feared to trouble her again. One day she noticed how much more constrained he was in talking to her than to others, and after that her father had to visit him alone.

Little by little, as Narcisse grew strong and well, even the old captain stopped going to see him ; and though 'Arriette still said he would soon remember, she noticed that her mother grew more and more gentle to her — as gentle as if she had died on her wedding-night. Mme. Beaujeais could be very gentle to the dead — at least to those who did not seem likely to go on doing shocking things.

Only a few of Narcisse's friends regained his friendship. He was more reserved and shy than he had been before, for he realized that people took more notice of him than of other men, and said less to him. He believed it had something to do with the night when he had found himself in Pontomoc ; but he could not bear to ask questions and show what a mystery that night still was to him. He was sure that he could think it out, and he gathered his little store of recent memories, and reasoned from them. He had the feeling that sometime he should find the key of it all when he was in his boat. The water seemed to be his home, and he was happier when he was out on it, although he had to relearn all the channels around Pontomoc. He had been



an oysterman, but now he went to the marshes only at long intervals ; for he was too restless to work. He sailed back and forth upon the bay, and once in a while he went to far-off Pointe des Chênes, but came back dissatisfied. He seemed like a child who has not found his purpose yet, and to whom the days are long ; and people fell into a way of touching their foreheads when they saw him, and saying, "That poor beau of 'Arriette !"

But 'Arriette spent hour after hour at her window, watching his sail as it plied aimlessly to and fro, veering from dark in the shadow to snowy white in the sunshine. Her heart followed it, and Narcisse began to seem less far from her. She felt that in some vague way he was trying to remember, although she did not know that he was thinking almost constantly of her. He had forgotten a great many things, but he could not forget the look with which she had shrunk away from him. He felt that he had brought a great sorrow into her life, and as soon as he could remember or think out what had happened, he meant to make amends.

One day 'Arriette saw his sail come skimming over the rippling blue, straight for the pier. She hurried down the path. He was already tying his boat, and she ran forward, holding out her hands ; but he came toward her slowly, and when she saw his face her

a long time, trying to find words to say why he had come.

"Now that I am here," he said at last, "I feel as if it might have been kinder to speak to some one else ; but I could not ask any one but you. Were you — did you not tell me, the night when I was hurt, that it was your wedding-night ?"

'Arriette could not look up. "Yes," she breathed.

There was another moment when the ripples whispered to the sand. Narcisse was standing very still now, and there was an absolute pallor on his face. "But you did not marry any one that night ?" he asked in a low voice.

She shook her head.

He came a step closer. He was finding it very hard to speak at all. "I remember that your father said something about my seaman-ship," he said. "Was it—was it because your lover was with me in the boat, and drowned ?"

She looked up at him then, and read the anguished face in which there was no memory. "No, no, Narcisse," she cried ; "he was not drowned."

Narcisse put his hand to his forehead. He had reasoned it all out so well ! "Not drowned ?" he said.

"No," she repeated ; "he was not drowned."

"What became of him?" he asked quickly like a child.

She looked off up the long bright vista where the bay wound inland, and her eyes seemed to see even beyond the farthest point where the dim blue shore-lines were lost between the shimmering water and the sky. "He was coming to marry me," she said softly, "and he called to me — we had promised each other we would call. I answered him, and I leaned out of the window, where the wind caught my veil and fluttered it in the light. He saw it, and forgot about the boat, and the sail jibed, and the boom struck him" — Her voice quivered, and she paused, still looking up the bay.

Narcisse felt his heart grow still, as if the bit of clearing between the marsh reeds and the pine-trees had become a holy place. His voice was very low. "And he was killed?" he asked.

"No," she said; "he was not killed." Her heart was beating so that she was scarcely able to measure out her words. "No; we thought for a while that he was dead, but he was only stunned and dazed. He grew better, and now he is strong again; but he does not remember that it was our wedding-night — or" — She could not go on; she had to turn and look into his face.

"He does not remember," Narcisse repeated,

With a puzzled wonder ; " he does not remember : why, then he is just like me."

" Yes," she said, meeting his eyes slowly ; " he is just like you."

The pine-trees behind them had caught the whisper of the waves and were echoing it, just as Narcisse had echoed all she said. He passed his hand across his brow again and spoke very low. " Were you going to marry me ? "

It seemed to 'Arriette that she could not answer him, but his troubled face besought her. " Yes," she told him ; " I was going to marry you."

He did not stir, but only looked at her as if his heart was breaking behind the barrier of his forgetfulness ; his voice was almost a sob : " I cannot remember *anything* except that I have loved you since that night."

The tears sprang into her eyes, and she stretched out her hands to him. To her there seemed nothing between them now, and her eyes shone through their tears. But Narcisse shook his head sadly. " Even now it does not seem right," he said. " There is such a cloud over me. It is like standing on a grave." He looked down at her, thinking how each beautiful sad line about her face would haunt him till he died ; and it seemed to him that he could never have forgotten if he had loved her before as he loved her now.

"If I could once think it all out and feel free again," he went on, at last, "I could throw myself into life and be what I was — be more than I was, perhaps" — his glance fell hopelessly — "if I could only remember."

She let one of her hands touch his. "What does it matter, Narcisse?" she said. "It is enough to love each other now. There is no need to remember anything but that."

"You are sure?" he asked.

She looked away from him, taking counsel once more of the sunlit bay, while she tried to find some reason that Narcisse could grasp to make his mind assured. "It is like forgiveness," she began. "Suppose one of us had done something wrong, and the other had forgiven it; that would be blotting out the past; and yet if we loved each other we should miss nothing." She paused and smiled up at him. "And so you see there is nothing to remember."

He nodded thoughtfully, and looked out over the water, across the futile reaches where he had sought so long. Tall and gray and lonely, a schooner stole toward the draw-bridge. There was scarcely a breath of air, and every sail was set, but against the vivid sky and water it rose, dark in its own shadow. At last it put about; its sails stood poised a moment, then flashed into the sunlight; the breeze filled them, and it glided toward the bridge, summoning the keeper with a cadence

like a lover's call. The bridge turned slowly, and the boat passed through.

Narcisse put out his hand to 'Arriette; a light that was sweeter than memory came to his eyes. "It *is* like forgiveness," he cried, "and we are free."

The white sails of the boat had reached the shining distances beyond the bridge.

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